

THE CLIMATE ADVOCACY LAB'S RESEARCH AGENDA 2021



**CLIMATE
ADVOCACY
LAB**

ClimateAdvocacyLab.org

JULY 2021

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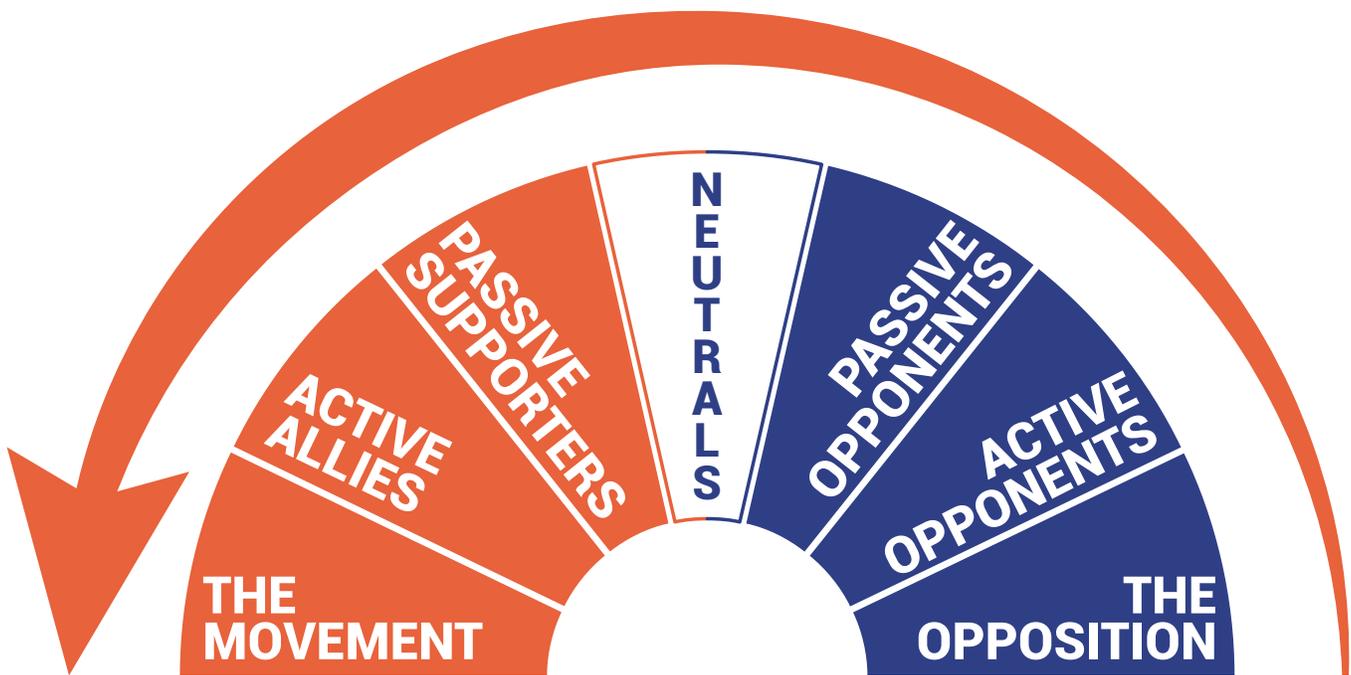
The Climate Advocacy Lab’s mission is to help the climate community build grassroots power and win through evidence-based advocacy. Our **Research Vision** drives the **Lab’s research, experimentation, and partnerships program**, which is constructed to generate knowledge where there are gaps in the community’s evidence base, and share that knowledge with the sector so we can be more effective. Research is core to the Lab’s goal of finding and highlighting evidence of what works (and what doesn’t) in climate advocacy.

In putting forward a research agenda, we hope to inspire and facilitate critical conversations for how we can improve our strategies and tactics, movement-wide. To that end, we also seek research that challenges assumptions, sparks new insights, and catalyzes conversation about the role evidence and research can play in climate advocacy. We welcome—and are seeking—input and feedback as we develop our research plans going forward.

We are also actively looking for partners to help us execute this agenda: climate advocacy organizations interested in field research, such as running tests in their programs; and funders willing to provide the resources to make ongoing learning possible. Please get in touch with **Justin Rolfe-Redding**.

The Lab’s research agenda is designed to support several interlocking theories of change in order to win on climate: Minimize Opposition; Expand the Movement; and Build Durable Grassroots Power.

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Momentum, The Power of Social Movements

HOW CAN WE MINIMIZE OPPOSITION?

Successful movements transform opponents into neutral bystanders. We need to know more about how to persuade ‘gettable’ conservatives that climate policy is not a threat. And how to break the ‘**pluralistic ignorance**’ among conservatives that renders invisible the climate hawks and clean energy supporters in their ranks. This can reduce the downsides for policymakers with conservative constituencies to support climate action, or at least not oppose it.

Research questions to help the climate movement minimize opposition to climate policy:

- Can **inoculation messages** reduce the effect of opposition messages during a highly contested campaign?
- We know that in academic studies, a **scientific consensus message** shifts attitudes. Does it do so in real world settings? For which kinds of people is it most effective, and when might it backfire? Which attitudes might it most effectively shift?
- Can we develop a statistical model to **predict the persuasive impact of climate digital advertising**, based on leading indicators of engagement (reducing the need for expensive and laborious testing)?
- Does **deep canvassing** durably shift climate attitudes (and actions)? Is it scalable? Are “deep phonebanks” also effective, scalable, and more efficient?
- Can **social norms** messages increase behaviors such as **climate conversations** and information sharing among those reluctant to speak up on the topic? What specific language and audience targeting is optimal?

HOW CAN WE EXPAND THE MOVEMENT?

Successful movements also grow their base of active allies and movement activists. There are many Americans who are already on our side and ready. Many are from frontline communities, and communities of color. Many people of color say they simply **haven't been asked** to participate, as climate/environment and multi-issue organizations working in these communities have been historically under-funded, and many outreach efforts to these communities by traditional climate organizations have been clumsy or even exploitative. Research can help answer questions for the frontline, community-based, people of color led, and environmental/climate justice organizations already doing organizing on the ground, and support other climate advocates to learn from the effective work they are doing. This can help to build an even larger engaged constituency pushing for climate wins.

Research questions to help the climate movement include more people and communities:

- What **organizing models and campaign strategies** have proven most effective to build power and win in climate, environmental, and energy work led by people of color? What can other organizers of color learn from this?
- Does **conveying the racial diversity of environmental organizations' memberships** increase engagement (specifically action taking, and identification as an "environmentalist") among people of color, and counteract myths about the low level of environmental concern in communities of color?
- Can we develop **new microtargeting models** that are better able to identify people of color interested in engaging in environmental/climate advocacy, and to identify those specifically receptive to climate justice issues?
- Can synthesizing existing knowledge—supplemented with new research—offer a **toolkit of climate justice and just transition communication best practices** in the US? What framing and messengers are most effective, and for which constituencies?

HOW CAN WE BUILD DURABLE GRASSROOTS POWER?

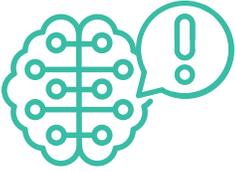
Successful movements translate passive and shallow support into active and committed involvement, channeled into strategies that shift power relations. The climate movement has historically under-invested in the kind of organizing and power building required for the depth, breadth, and duration of policy and social transformation demanded by climate change. There is a great deal we do not know at **every level** of the processes involved, from the best techniques for absorption and up-laddering activists into higher-bar actions, to the most powerful techniques of policymaker contact, **how to foster sustained engagement** beyond short term mobilization, the scalability and effectiveness of decentralized and **distributed organizing** models, and how social movement strategy can be aligned to expand and build new kinds of power. Answering these questions will help produce the durable political will for policy wins today, and down the road.

The climate movement has under-invested in the power building required for the transformation demanded by climate change

Research questions to help the climate movement build the power it needs:

- When is making a **small vs. a large initial climate ask** optimal (or providing a menu of actions), especially considering how this may impact sustained engagement later?
- Can **'legitimation rhetoric'** (acknowledging difficulty of a call to action) increase participation in high bar asks?
- What methods work best to **cement climate activist identity, encourage absorption into an organization, and increase action taking, commitment, and leadership?** For instance, what is the effectiveness of online **community spaces, buddy systems,** or offering volunteers more **agency** and involvement in **strategy planning?** And what can member data tell us about key inflection points in the activist journey?
- Because we know that personalized contact from constituents is more influential with policymakers, what techniques are effective at **increasing rates of personalization** when supporters contact policymakers?
- For example, are interventions based on changing social norm and self-efficacy beliefs effective?
- We know that **distributed organizing** models can be effective in building power. How can we optimize this approach? What characteristics differentiate more vs. less effective chapters? What techniques increase participation in 'snowflake' model relational organizing?
- What is the effect of **sharing climate public opinion polling with policymakers?** Does it vary based on the nature of the opinion data (specificity of survey question to relevant policy; in-district vs. statewide; level of support expressed by data), or issue (low vs. high salience policy)?
- What lessons on **organizing, strategy, coalition building, and power mapping** can we learn from comparing the outcomes of the most significant recent climate campaigns?

THE LAB'S RESEARCH PRINCIPLES



KNOWLEDGE FOR IMPACT

We focus on answering those questions that are most likely to contribute to climate advocacy wins through high-impact interventions.



THEORY INTO PRACTICE

We can generate the most impact from research by taking theories and principles that have been generated or vetted in the basic science 'laboratory' setting of academic social science or through the experiential insights of practitioners, and rigorously evaluate them in the field.



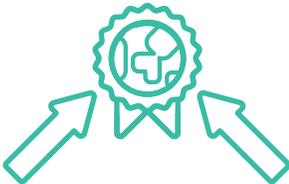
PORTABLE RESULTS

To ensure that what we learn from one study with one organization can be in dialog with other knowledge and relatable to the work of other organizations, we seek to ground our research in fundamental concepts and theories and focus on advocacy tactics and strategies that can be reproduced by other advocates.



EQUITY & INCLUSION

People of color-led, indigenous, community-based and climate justice focused organizations experience **disparities** in resources, from funding to attention from the research community, along with a marginalization of their knowledge. We seek to help to redress this with a preference for partnering with and answering the questions posed by these organizations, and with the humility to listen and learn from them.



TRIANGULATION

The landscape of climate advocacy is diverse, and in order to understand if the insights from one research project apply more broadly—or if there are important differences across campaigns, communities, or other particulars of context—we seek to ask the same question with multiple partners on the ground, drawing insights from where the answers agree or diverge.



CLOSING THE LOOP

The lifecycle of knowledge is only half completed at the conclusion of a given study. The Lab leverages results from our research into insights shared back with the rest of the Lab community through our training and education programs.