

BUILDING

2021

STRUCTURE

SHAPES

**WHAT STRUCTURE REVEALS
ABOUT STRATEGY FROM SIX
MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS
IN TRANSITION**



Thank you to my collaborators!

Thank you to our core team at the Realizing Democracy Project – Ben Chin, Joy Cushman, Ethan Frey, and Kevin Simowitz – whose collective thinking scaffolded this project. Thank you for trusting me to give this research texture, allowing it to grow way beyond its bounds, and offering constant encouragement and support.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How do leaders architect successful organizational structures?

This research project uses the term 'structure' to describe the organizational forms that social change groups create in order to organize relationships of solidarity and collaboration between people building political power together. It studies organizational forms through three lenses: membership, staff, and movement ecosystems. The report offers six case studies of people-powered organizations whose leaders have pivoted their structures and strategies in the last five years. By examining how these pivots unfolded over time through narratives of key choice points leaders faced in times of crisis and transformation, the study approaches structure as an ongoing, relational process of *structuring*.

The research design was developed collaboratively with organizational partners: Sunrise, Color Of Change, United for Respect, ISAIAH, New York Working Families Party, and Florida's StateWide Alignment Group. The project used a multi-method approach, including interviews with leaders and staff and analysis of organizational documents and data. Case studies were presented at bimonthly learning sessions with a working group of funders, academics, and movement practitioners, fostering collective discussion about the project's core questions.

For each organizational case, the report offers a *structure shape*. These metaphorical shapes, like a boat, a big tent, a house, a Rubik's cube, and a fractal, represent how an organization manages a

particular contradiction or tension present in one of the three lenses on structuring. For membership, Sunrise's boat and Color Of Change's big tent offer different approaches to bringing together scale and depth. For staff, United for Respect's Rubik's cube and ISAIAH's house offer different ways to manage the interaction between staff and member power. For movement ecologies, the New York Working Families Party's stool and the StateWide Alignment Group's fractal calibrate the balance between affiliate autonomy and coordination differently. Presenting two cases for each lens shows how organizations have taken different paths when faced with similar structure puzzles, each of which brings unique benefits and challenges.

Ultimately, structure shapes enable organizations to shape power. Leaders manage trade-offs and tensions in structuring processes in the service of building their constituencies' power, both internally within the organization and externally in the political realm. Looking across the case studies, the report offers insights into how structure shapes can facilitate multiracial membership and member participation within an organization, as well as political power in the wider community.

These case studies indicate that, when faced with structure challenges, movement leaders invested in their organizations' *structuring capacity* in order to innovate new structures (and strategies) to meet new political moments. These findings offer a framework and vocabulary that can support movement leaders as they face their own structure-strategy pivots and deepen their structuring capacity in times of organizational challenge.

RESEARCH

DESIGN



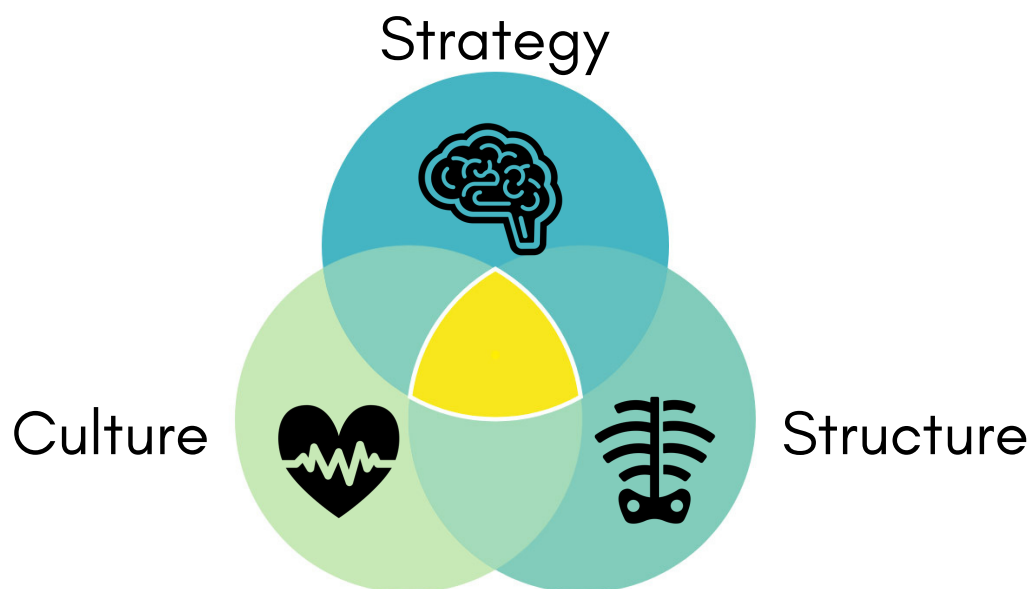
BUILDING STRUCTURE SHAPES

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

In our experience, movement leaders have an abundant vocabulary for talking about their strategies. Yet when it comes to their structures – how they shape their membership, staff, and coalitions – leaders are curiously quiet. If strategy makes up the brain and culture the beating heart of a social movement organization, then structure is the skeleton. Yet it often feels taboo to ask movement leaders to 'show their bones' (or their org charts) to others, despite the urgent need for frank conversation about the structures that best build people power. To understand structure better, we need to put on X-ray glasses that allow us to see movement skeletons.

This project aims to do just that, to shine a light on how social movement organizations structure themselves through three lenses: membership, staff, and movement ecology. My partners and I on the Structure-Strategy Core Team convened a working group of movement leaders, funders, and academics as part of the Realizing Democracy Project. Our aim was to expand our vocabulary and conceptual frameworks about social movement structure, which are laid out in the following pages (see *Understanding Structure*). Structure refers here to the organizational forms that social change groups create to organize relationships of solidarity and collaboration between people, by channeling flows of resources, information, work, governance, and accountability for the purpose of building political power.

Movement leaders often recognize that strategy is contingent – responsive to their constituencies, resources, goals, and the many external factors that make up our political terrain. But there is a tendency to see structure as more static, as an object or even a template that can be replicated. In this report, we understand structure as an ongoing, relational process of structuring – captured by but not reducible to the momentary snapshot of an organizational chart or a reporting structure. Structuring responds to the same contingencies of constituencies, resources, goals, and political terrain. Structuring is also shaped by the past choices an organization has made, which limit the options available in the present moment.



INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

If you've come to these pages looking for a silver bullet to solve your organizational woes or an exhaustive list of possible structures, this report will disappoint – we don't think such a thing exists. Because each structuring process is unique, our question is rather: how do leaders architect successful organizational structures? What this report offers are narratives of key choice points leaders have faced in times of crisis and transformation and how they pivoted their structures and strategies in response, investing in their organizations' structuring capacity (see *Structure-Strategy Pivots*). Our team chose six organizations that had undergone structure-strategy pivots in the last five years, and I partnered with their leaders to develop case studies about their organizational transformations. Pivots are moments where an organization has cracked open along its seams – one Executive Director called it a “dark night of the soul” – when unspoken assumptions or invisible systems are surfaced and transformed. As such, organizations that are undergoing or have undergone such a transformation are more acutely aware of their structures and strategies than others, making them research partners well attuned to our questions. Tracking pivots over time allows us to reconstruct structuring processes and explore the conditions for successful structuring.

The research presumes that structure and strategy are co-constitutive, constraining and enabling one another, and often shift in tandem. To better understand how an organization's strategy is encoded in its structure (see *Nexus of Structure + Strategy*), I look at where strategic decision-making ‘lives’ within an organization and how that location shifts over time.

Our choice of cases (see *Overview of Cases*) is drawn from organizations with existing relationships of trust and collaboration with working group partners. As a result, the project's sample skews towards non-profits, an organizational form designed more for corporate profit-making than for the democratic goals of increasing people's participation in the institutions that shape their lives. Unsurprisingly, the organizations in our study struggled to build member power within the confines of the legal structures imposed on them by the non-profit industrial complex. In other regards, however, our sample maximizes difference, with enormous range in issue areas, constituencies, scopes, strategies, and structures. Since the project aims to be useful to the widest possible audience of movement leaders, we hope readers can see some of their own organization reflected in at least one of the cases.

In bimonthly digital gatherings, organizational leaders and I presented the case studies to the wider Structure-Strategy Working Group. Afterwards, we held a facilitated discussion on key challenges and learnings within the organization. While a report cannot capture the atmosphere of solidarity and vulnerability in those meetings, we hope it can stimulate similarly frank discussion within organizations that want to use it as an agitation for their own self-assessment. Because the working group conversations also served as rich material for the conceptual framework shared here, I often write from the ‘we’ to capture this collective thinking; where the analysis is primarily my own, I use the first person.

UNDERSTANDING STRUCTURE

I use the term 'structure' to describe the organizational forms that social change groups create to organize relationships of solidarity and collaboration between people in the service of building political power. Structure includes flows of resources, work, information, governance, and accountability. These flows are distributed and managed in ways that are local, contingent, and responsive to contextual factors, particularly the class, sexuality, race, gender, and other identities of the constituencies that make up the organization. In this project, I examine structure through three lenses: membership, staff, and movement ecosystem. In our learning process within the structure-strategy working group, the following conceptual tools sharpened our thinking about structure:

- *Structure as relationship*
- *Structure as a process and "structuring capacity"*
- *Organizational isomorphism*
- *The non-profit structure*
- *Power and the 'prism' of organizational design*

Structure as relationship

The organizations profiled in this project understand that their power comes from their people, and that an organization is a steward of the relationships between its members. At its core, an organizational form is a way of structuring relationships of solidarity and collaboration, particularly relationships of accountability between leaders and constituents. Structures can build constituents' strategic capacity and democratic participation within an organization, and enable them to exercise that power externally in civil society or government.

Structure as a process and "structuring capacity"

As a relationship, a structure is a process, not a reified object. Inspired by Marshall Ganz's understanding of strategy as a process, this project approaches structure not as a static organizational chart, but as a living evolution of decision-making processes over time. In his work on strategy, Ganz (2010) developed the concept of "strategic capacity," shifting the question from 'What is the ideal strategy?' to 'How do leaders develop winning strategies?' Similarly, there is no single ideal structure for a social movement organization, but leaders can develop what I call *structuring capacity* to enable their organization's flows of resources, work, information, governance, and accountability to best achieve its aims.

The non-profit structure

If there is no ideal structure for social movement groups, why do so many look alike? The predominant structure is the non-profit, a legal entity modeled on corporate structures which hierarchically concentrate power at the top. In addition, resources for non-profits often come from private funding or, less commonly, the state, rather than from members themselves. These aspects of organizational design make it harder for social movement organizations to be accountable to their membership base (rather than funders or elites). This report documents organizations' structure innovations to build member participation and power within an organizational form not designed for such.

Organizational Isomorphism

"Institutional isomorphism" helps explain how social change organizations become similar to one another over time through the pressures of the non-profit industrial complex. A concept in the natural and social sciences that describes a similarity of form in two different entities, "isomorphism" was adopted and repurposed by sociologists DiMaggio and Powell (1983). They describe three mechanisms of what they call "institutional isomorphism" to explain how institutions come to resemble one another.

- Coercive isomorphism occurs when organizations accommodate external pressures by other organizations they are dependent on (like funders).
- Mimetic isomorphism happens when organizations imitate other organizations' structures in response to uncertainty or change.
- Normative isomorphism describes standardization among organizations due to professional norms.

"Non-profit industrial complex"

is a term coined by INCITE!, a network of radical feminists of color, and elaborated in their book *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (2007).

According to INCITE! (2007) "The state uses non-profits to:

- Monitor and control social justice movements;
- Divert public monies into private hands through foundations;
- Manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism;
- Redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society;
- Allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through 'philanthropic' work;
- Encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than to challenge them"

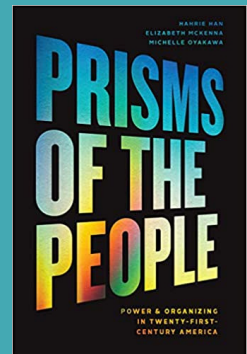
<https://incite-national.org/beyond-the-non-profit-industrial-complex/>

The 'prism' of organizational design

The non-profit form can compromise the ability of social movement organizations to build member power and participation within the organization internally, but also their ability to exercise political power externally in government and civic life.

To understand the linkages between internal organizational structures and external power outcomes, we turned to Hahrie Han, Liz McKenna, and Michelle Oyakawa's new book *Prisms of the People: Power and Organizing in Twenty-First Century America*. In it, they develop the concept of the prism to describe an organization's internal design: "the organization [...] is the prism that refracts the actions of a constituency into political power." Resources, in this case people's collective actions, are the light that filters into the organization, the prism. Depending on the quality and strength of the organization's internal design, the organization will be more or less successful at refracting that light outwards into external power-building outcomes, like policy wins or a seat at decision-making tables.

In Han, McKenna, and Oyakawa's study, successful organizations have several internal design choices in common, such as:



- they build independent, committed, flexible constituencies;
- they distribute strategy among and practice accountability to base;
- they develop "learning loops" to grow capacity;
- and they focus on the downstream consequences (or what they call "civic feedbacks") of power moves.

Thinking about organizational structure as a prism allows us to link the internal design of an organization (prism) to its external outcomes (power), and assess if certain designs better enable organizations to accomplish their power-building goals. Throughout the case study profiles, I note external outcomes of internal pivots when possible, though many organizations were still in the midst of their pivot at the time of research, making outcomes unmeasurable. In the 'Political Power' section of this report, I look more closely at the internal structures that independent political organizations innovate to serve their aspirations to external political power.

"How things happen is why things happen."

– Charles Tilly (2006)

Looking at structure as a **relational process**, not a static object or final destination, means looking at **change over time**. During its founding, an organization is often uniquely impressionable, so its structure choices can be influenced strongly by its external environment (for example, the structure choices of similar organizations or the demands of funders). Known in organizational theory as "imprinting" (Stinchcombe 1965), this process imprints existing structural features onto the organization that endure, even when the environment has changed.

When leaders find that these **older structures or strategies are mismatched to current opportunities and threats**, they face a set of choices for moving forward. In these crisis moments, an organization can crack open along its seams – one Executive Director in this study even called it a "dark night of the soul" – as unspoken assumptions or invisible systems are raised to the surface and transformed. The new structures and strategies the organization crafts in response will become institutionalized and path-dependent, opening up and foreclosing future options down the road. Some leaders have described wishing they had a broader imagination of their possible structuring options when they reach these forks in the road, and this report hopes to expand their range of choices.

It is beyond the scope of this research to ascertain if structure shifts *always* necessitate strategy shifts (and vice versa), but the project focuses on organizations where that has been the case. It looks at a sample of social change organizations where a **significant structure-strategy pivot** (sometimes several) occurred in the last five years, from 2015 to 2020. I examine 'before' and 'after' snapshots of the organization's structure and strategy, as well as the process of the pivot itself, in order to tell a story of organizational realignment. This dynamism operationalizes our understanding of structure as a verb by looking at the conditions and processes that go into successful structuring. This focus on pivots also allows the project to trace the decision-making processes involved in the pivot, illuminating where strategic decision-making 'lives' within an organizational structure. Since we understand decision-making to be one key site where strategy and structure intersect, examining the pivot gives us insight into who exercises decision-making power in the organization, where, and in what roles.

If culture is the heart, strategy the brain, and structure the skeleton of a movement, how can we think about specific interactions between these three components? Although culture was an ever-present backdrop of this research and is woven into the case studies, the project's core team decided to focus primarily on the structure-strategy nexus, our curiosity guided by several research questions.

(How) Is an organization's strategy encoded in its structure? How does structure change when strategy changes and vice versa?

The structure of an organization can reflect an organization's values and theory of change. However, these values and strategies may not always be apparent to the organization itself, which is where research can play a role by illuminating them. This research presumes structure and strategy to be co-constitutive, though we do not posit a specific causal relationship between them. The structure an organization builds will enable and constrain who it can organize as constituents. An organizational design that prioritizes members with lots of free time for volunteer labor will need to pivot if it wants to organize working-class constituencies. The structure an organization chooses can also shape its menu of strategies. A structure designed to remain small, for instance, will probably not deploy a strategy of mass mobilization, which requires the organization build structures for a larger scale. If a horizontal, informal network decides to advance an electoral strategy, it may have to pivot to build a system for unified decision-making in order to endorse a candidate. And vice versa: an organization's strategy choices will, in turn, enable and constrain what structures it can build. An organization whose primary strategy is lobbying political elites is probably not interested in democratic structures for member representation in decision-making, since they perceive their power to come through 'buck' (money and influence) rather than 'body' (mass mobilization). A strategy shift from online to offline engagement requires new staff and membership structures for face-to-face organizing. This research looks at moments where each organization faced a dilemma where their structure and strategy were out of sync with new opportunities or threats, necessitating that both evolve to meet the new political moment.

Where does strategy 'live' within an organization's structure? Where and how does strategic decision-making take place?

One way to track the nexus of structure and strategy is to look at sites of decision-making within an organization, particularly around strategy, and how they shift over time. Case study conversations explored questions like: Who is at the table for strategic decision-making? How are members able to participate and build strategic capacity? How are leaders accountable to their constituencies about their strategies? By focusing on structure-strategy pivots, the case studies are able to track decision-making processes that facilitate pivots in the face of crisis.

OVERVIEW OF CASES

Our choice of cases is drawn from organizations with existing relationships of trust and collaboration with working group partners. As a result, the project's sample skews towards non-profits, an organizational form designed more for corporate profit-making than for the democratic goals of increasing people power. Unsurprisingly, the organizations in our study struggled to build member power within the confines of the legal structures imposed on them by the non-profit industrial complex. In other regards, however, our sample maximizes difference, with enormous range in issue areas, constituencies, scopes, strategies, and structures. Since the project aims to be useful to the widest possible audience of movement leaders, we hope readers can see some of their own organization reflected in at least one of the cases.

Organization	Scope	Core Constituency	Core Issue	Strategy Pivot	Structure Pivot
Sunrise	National	Young people	Environmental justice	Strengthen local organizing to build working-class, multiracial base	More staff support for local chapters, networks between chapters
Color Of Change	National	Multiracial, centering Black people	Racial justice	Expand to electoral interventions for criminal justice campaigns	Build PAC, expand online to offline, build out local squads
United for Respect	National	Retail workers	Economic justice	Expand focus to new corporate and Wall Street players	Reorganize staff teams and constituency structures
ISALAH	State (Minnesota)	Faith communities	Multi-issue	Center power-building and multiracial democracy	Reorganize staff to center organizers, build out ISALAH's house and a new c4
New York Working Families Party	State (New York)	Affiliates with many constituencies	Progressive governing power	WFP 2.0: diversify party's ideology and base	Build or strengthen structures for individuals and non-c4 movement groups
StateWide Alignment Group (SWAG)	State (Florida)	Affiliates with many constituencies	Multi-issue	Expand from local/regional strategy to coordinated state-wide strategy	Align six state orgs and develop vehicles like a c4 for collective capacity

STRUCTURE

SHAPES



BUILDING STRUCTURE SHAPES

WHAT ARE STRUCTURE SHAPES?

The **multi-method research** process began with a collaboration with movement leaders to identify a recent structure-strategy pivot they wanted to explore more deeply. These leaders shared documents like org charts, funder reports, internal memos, and external media with me, as well as quantitative data about membership and funding. I analyzed the material, developing a set of intuitions and questions that I then tested and refined in semi-structured interviews with six to nine staff or former staff per organization (and in Sunrise's case, group interviews with a larger number of staff). What surfaced was a narrative about the organization's structure-strategy pivot(s), captured concisely in the profiles on the following pages. Because each case is richer than can be captured here, several longer case studies will be published as part of the P3 Lab's case study library within the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University in 2022.

Approaching the research inductively, what emerged across all the cases are what I call '**structure shapes**', captured with the metaphorical images of a boat, a big tent, a house, a Rubik's cube, a stool, and a fractal (represented by a nautilus shell). The shapes I chose are concrete, everyday objects, rather than the geometries of organizational charts. What gives them life is that they embody the contradictions organizations wrestle with in their structuring processes, which are creatively managed but never fully resolved by structure-strategy pivots.

For each of the **three lenses on structure** used in this project, a particular **tension** surfaced as most salient:

- for membership structures, the tension between scale and depth;
- for staff structures, the interaction between staff and member power;
- for movement ecology structures, the balance between affiliate autonomy and coordination.

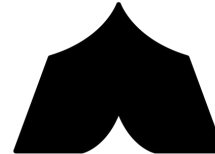
Though we can look at every organization through all three lenses, I chose to sort the cases according to which lens provided the most learning. I present two cases for each lens to show how organizations have taken different paths when faced with similar structure puzzles, each of which brings its own benefits and challenges.

After each **organizational profile**, I offer an **analysis of the structure shape** that emerged from that case, distilling its central features and its trade-offs when managing structural tensions. Shapes are abstracted out of their original context to serve as ideal types, recognizable in other organizations. However, because the shapes emerged from single case studies, additional research is needed to identify other shapes, as well as further examples of these shapes (for example, who else has built a boat or a stool?)

STRUCTURING MEMBERSHIP

Key Question:

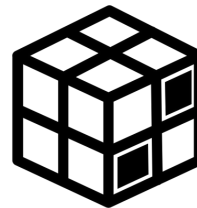
What membership structures hybridize scale and depth?



STRUCTURING STAFF

Key Question:

What staff structures build member power?



STRUCTURING MOVEMENT ECOLOGIES

Key Question:

What ecosystem formations balance affiliate autonomy and coordination?



Key Question:

What membership structures hybridize scale and depth?

A boat is a hybrid of a structure-based organizing model and a protest-based mobilizing model: a small staff hull with large movement sails, poised to catch political whirlwinds.



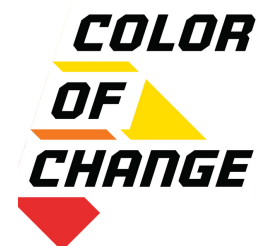
Sunrise was designed as a small staff boat with large sails of decentralized membership. These sails are raised to catch the whirlwinds of political momentum, using a mobilizing strategy to get to scale. But the boat can also put out its oars in low-momentum times to do the deeper work of relational organizing.



A big tent is a political home whose broad sense of identity is united by a shared culture.



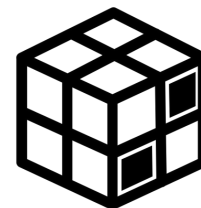
Color Of Change's expansion from online to offline organizing turned its circle of online subscribers into a roof for a big tent, putting down stakes in an on-the-ground operation for face-to-face organizing. The tent's many on and offline points of entry have served an influx of new members since the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings. To manage this growth in scale, COC is building out different lanes for members within the tent, including a squad' member structure to support deeper organizing.



Key Question:

What staff structures build member power?

A **Rubik's Cube** is a hybrid of a campaign staff model and a base-building organization staff model.



United for Respect has experimented with several staff team structures to find which best builds member power. These are symbolized by a Rubik's cube: a multi-colored face brings together various staff roles onto teams in a campaign shop staff structure, whereas a monochromatic face organizes teams by role in a base-building staff structure.



Each room in **a house** represents a constituency organized by a staff organizer. Organizers and constituencies meet and strategize in the house commons. Other staff roles function as utilities like plumbing and electricity that serve the house as a whole.



Minnesota faith-based organization **ISAIAH** has doubled down on a base-building staff structure. It renovated its organizational house to put organizers and their constituencies at the center of its org chart and of strategic decision-making. This enabled ISAIAH to cut new turf and build new, multiracial rooms in its house.



Key Question:

What ecosystem formations balance affiliate autonomy and coordination?

A stool is a coalition where affiliated organizations (the legs of the stool) build a permanent, independent structure (the seat of the stool). In WFP NY's case, this independent structure is a recognized third party.



The **NY Working Families Party's** stool requires enormous coordination among its individuals, labor, and 501(c)(4) community organization members (the legs) to create a permanent, independent party (the seat). This coordination was threatened when labor affiliate's asserted their autonomy, leaving the stool wobbly. New leadership envisions a 'WFP 2.0' which strengthens and expands the stool's legs to help stabilize the party.



A fractal is a structure of collaboration that aligns the goals, capacities, and strategic action of several organizations towards shared long-term power-building. In a fractal, a repeating pattern of alignment happens between organizations at different scales, both geographically (f.e. local, regional, statewide) and structurally (between leaders, staff, or members of different organizations).



Florida's StateWide Alignment Group has organized its movement ecology as a more fluid, behind-the-scenes alignment with more autonomy for affiliates than a coalition. SWAG has collectivized the capacities of six state organizations at local, regional, and state levels, creating a fractal of alignment from the micro to the macro.



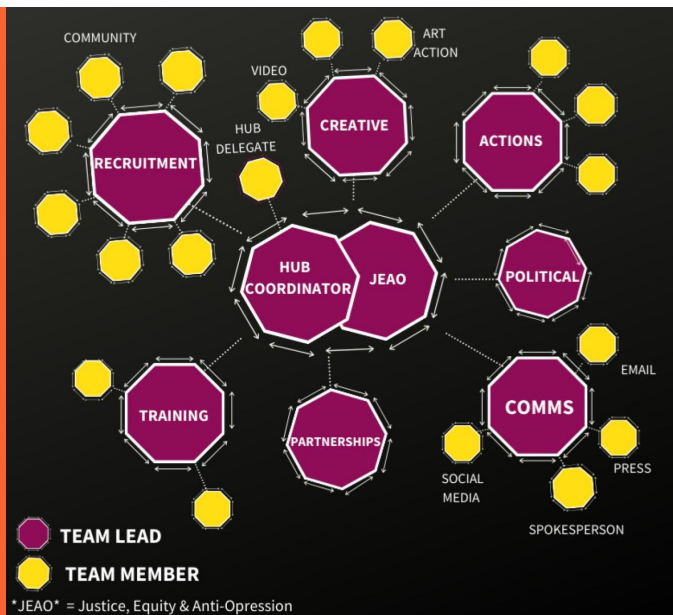


SHAPES FOR MEMBERSHIP

COLOR OF CHANGE + SUNRISE

ORGANIZATION

Sunrise is a national youth movement to stop climate change, build good jobs, and realign the Democrats towards a Green New Deal. Sunrise was structured as a small staff boat with large movement sails, poised to catch political whirlwinds. When it did, Sunrise's boat went through the growing-pains of rapid expansion. Sunrise has since experimented with structures to balance national staff coordination and local member support and autonomy.



MEMBERSHIP

Sunrise's members are largely organized into hubs, which any group of three people can form after taking action and undergoing training. Sunrise currently has 336 hubs, mostly in cities, high schools, and colleges, and a presence in every state. Hubs can 'vote with their feet' to participate in national campaigns or not.

PIVOT

Sunrise is currently undergoing a change of guard in organizational leadership and reimagining its structure and strategy for a new era under the Biden administration. This requires both more policy-oriented strategy, as well as structures that nurture deep organizing on a local level.

question:

What structures allow for aligned national mobilization and local relational organizing?

THE BOAT: SUNRISE MOVEMENT



Concerned about the rapidly shrinking timeline to stop climate change, a group of young climate justice leaders decided to create Sunrise in 2016. They based their designs on the Momentum model, which aims to hybridize the depth of the structure-based tradition of community and labor organizing with the scale of the mass protest tradition. Structurally, Sunrise planned for a small national staff organization and a large movement structure of decentralized local chapters, known as hubs. The vision was a boat with a small staff hull and large movement sails, poised to catch political whirlwinds and grow rapidly at the right moment.

Momentum is a training institute and movement incubator whose model aims to take the best of both structure-based and mass protest traditions in order to mitigate each one's pitfalls (Engler and Engler 2016). It adopts community and labor organizing's expertise at depth (for example, through intensive leadership development of members towards clear metrics of success), while leaving its tendencies towards incrementalism and bureaucratic institutions behind. It hybridizes this depth with the scale of the protest tradition, where

mass mobilizations have been able to dramatically shift political weather and the Overton window on policy in whirlwind moments. This hybrid of depth and scale hopes to similarly avoid the protest tradition's flaws: decentralization that often devolves into structurelessness, without clear leadership, shared strategy, or metrics of success.

Sunrise was incubated according to Momentum's model, where a small group of leaders 'frontloads' an organization's DNA (its structure, strategy, story, and culture). The DNA is then given away at scale through mass trainings, which absorb an influx of new people and unusual suspects drawn in by the movement's attractional organizing and mediagenic direct actions. These new members can then join a decentralized network of local chapters doing deeper organizing. The DNA includes a clear goal and a common strategy -- in Sunrise's case, an electoral realignment of the Democrats towards a Green New Deal. Ideally, this shared compass provides enough strategic unity (drawn from the structure-based tradition) to maintain alignment in a swift-moving decentralized organization (inspired by the protest tradition).

Momentum's Theory of Change

Depth/Structure-Based

Community + labor organizing

- **Structure-strategy:** Often centralized
- **Depth:** Intensive leadership development, clear metrics of success
- **Drawbacks:** Often incrementalist, risk-averse, inertial, and bureaucratic



Scale/Mass Protest

Whirlwind moments: Occupy, BLM, Arab Spring, #MeToo

- **Structure-strategy:** Often decentralized
- **Scale:** Attracts unusual suspects, high impact on public opinion in short time
- **Drawbacks:** Unclear leadership + metrics of success, can't sustain pressure



Momentum's Hybrid Model

- **Structure-strategy:** Frontload DNA with metrics of success to enable distributed organization
- **Scale:** Attractional organizing (mediagenic direct action) turns out unusual suspects
- **Depth:** Mass training in DNA absorbs new people into local chapters for deeper organizing

THE BOAT: SUNRISE MOVEMENT



Momentum's theory of change requires sustained mass participation and a movement at the scale required to stop climate change simply cannot be staffed. So Sunrise's commitment to volunteerism dictated that the staff hull would remain small and the movement sails large and many. However, founders did want clear structures of rank and leadership so as to avoid the "tyranny of structurelessness", which allows privilege to reassert itself through informal and thereby unaccountable leadership. To find a compromise between centralization and decentralization, they decided on staff command and control of national-level campaigns, which hubs can opt in or out of by 'voting with their feet'.

Sunrise got their whirlwind moment shortly after the 2018 midterms, when they occupied Speaker Pelosi's office to demand the new Democratic House majority they had helped win commit to taking action on climate change. This was part of Sunrise's strategy to realign the Democratic party away from fossil fuel billionaires and towards a new consensus on climate. This mediagenic 'trigger event' led to massive growth in both Sunrise's staff and base. The latter currently consists of 336 hubs, nearly 7,000 members participating in recent high-bar actions, and 233,000 email subscribers. But catching the winds of momentum also put enormous strain on Sunrise's boat. The staff hull grew far beyond Sunrise's original plans and the organization has had to innovate new structures every few months to keep up.

Sunrise has leveraged this internal growth for external wins, mobilizing its members as youth foot soldiers in recent elections. The boat's decentralized structure even enabled a single Sunrise staffer to found a distributed volunteer team that eventually made 6.2 million calls in the 2020 elections. However, as Sunrise has grown, the ropes connecting the staff hull and the movement

sails have frayed. Hubs' 'vote with your feet' autonomy has prompted contradictory responses – some hubs need more staff support to be able to implement national campaigns, while others want more autonomy to pursue their own local strategies. Sunrise has pivoted in response to these new challenges of scale. It has innovated a number of structures to address the staff-hub relationship, providing staff support to hubs through the Movement Support team, regional organizers, and a distributed peer coaching network across hubs. These create relational glue that helps keep the movement aligned as it faces new waters.

Currently, Sunrise faces the challenge of balancing its existing success at mobilizing to scale with a desire for greater depth through organizing. The Momentum model suggests that structure should be fluid enough to meet the moment – that Sunrise should hoist its mobilizing sails in high momentum times and put out its oars for deeper organizing in low momentum moments. Sunrise is currently navigating a leadership transition as new, younger leaders re-frontload the organization's DNA for the Biden era. As Sunrise undergoes this new pivot, there is a sense that the organization has tipped too far towards scale and must recalibrate its balance between scale and depth. It can accomplish this by building more capacity for the structure-based tradition of local, relational organizing.

While Momentum's model has always been a hybridization of scale and depth, some conversations in Sunrise's base have polarized the two. National staff coordination, scale, mobilizing, symbolic and narrative change are lumped together, and set in opposition to local hub autonomy, depth, organizing, and instrumental change. Sunrise's challenge moving forward is to disaggregate and hybridize these binary oppositions: to 'both and' a division framed as 'either or' in the spirit of Momentum's hybrid.



Key Question:

What membership structures hybridize scale and depth?

Boat: Organizing achieves depth in low-momentum times (rowing with oars) and mobilizing achieves scale in high-momentum times (sailing with sails).

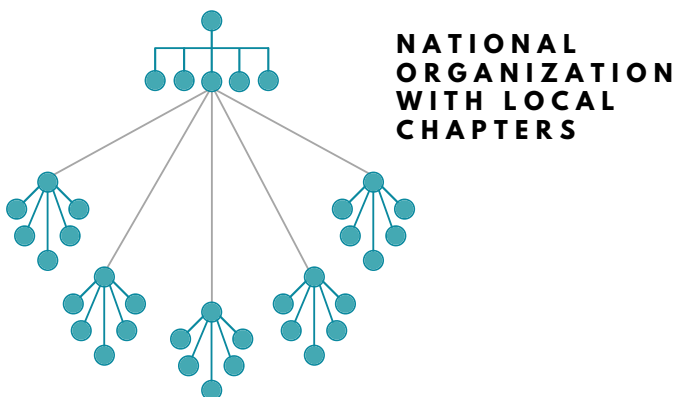
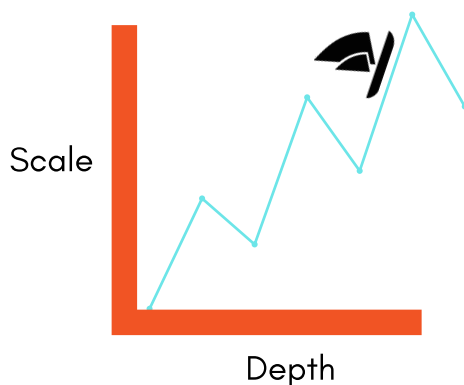


Image: adapted from Movement Net Lab

Boats move in and out of scale and depth depending on the political moment



Features of a Boat

A boat is a hybrid of a structure-based organizing model and a protest-based mobilizing model: a small staff hull with large movement sails, poised to catch political whirlwinds.

What can a boat do? Be agile and streamlined, with minimal organization so as to catch political momentum

Ideal conditions for building a boat? By focusing on a single issue and core constituency (in Sunrise's case climate change and youth), a boat can achieve speed and agility. Ideal scope is a national organization, where mobilizing is centralized, with local chapters which focus on organizing. Strategy and tactics include direction action and digital-forward approaches in order to move public opinion and narrative change.

Opportunities

- Can quickly change political weather and absorb large numbers of new participants
- DNA provides enough infrastructure, metrics of success, and decision-making systems to avoid common pitfalls of protest movements

Challenges

- Risks of minimal structures: decentralization can lead to disalignment, lack of sufficient infrastructure
- National strategy centralized in staff, potential for conflict with local strategy at membership level

ORGANIZATION

Color Of Change is the nation's largest digital racial justice organization, aiming for "real world change that Black people can feel". Centering the cultivation of Black joy, COC has a multi-issue theory of change that ranges from economic to media to electoral justice. Color Of Change has a similarly expansive organizational structure, which together with membership has grown massively since the Black Lives Matter uprisings of 2020.



question:

What are the 'stickiest' pathways to long-term engagement within Color Of Change's big tent?

MEMBERSHIP

Color Of Change provides a 'big tent' for the Black community and allies, with many campaigns serving as entry points for members. COC uses a matrix rather than a ladder of engagement, to recognize rather than hierarchize various modes of member engagement. A transition from on to offline organizing has allowed COC to balance this scale with greater depth, for instance through long-term membership structures like squads.

PIVOT

Color Of Change's corporate and political campaign juggernaut hit a snag in the field of criminal justice, causing leadership to pivot towards an electoral strategy of defining and voting in progressive district attorneys, judges, and prosecutors. Structurally, this led to the formation of a PAC for electoral programs and a year-round online-to-offline organizing program to build local squads.



THE BIG TENT: COLOR OF CHANGE



In the wake of the Black Lives Matter uprisings of 2020, national racial justice organization Color Of Change underwent massive growth, with an 5.8 million increase in subscribers. This came on top of COC's six-fold increase in staff since 2015, the year it expanded from online to offline organizing. Before the pivot, COC was a digital-forward organization, structured largely as a circle of subscribers connected to a central campaign staff. By building an offline presence, COC turned that circle into a large roof with stakes in an on-the-ground operation: a big tent. How is COC managing this new scale, and balancing it with deep organizing of new members?

Color Of Change's tent was constructed through the organization's pivot from digital mobilizing to in-person electoral and then local organizing starting in 2015. COC's police accountability work was not getting the same traction as its other campaigns, so leadership made a decision to focus on electing progressive district attorneys, judges, and prosecutors. This strategic pivot required new forms of offline, in-person organizing, like inventing the first ever text-a-thon and other get-out-the-vote activities. In order to scaffold this new strategy, COC built out new structures for both the staff organization (a PAC) and for membership (local squads).

Color Of Change is a big tent, not just structurally but also in terms of strategy, with campaigns ranging from tech accountability to Black representation in Hollywood to eviction moratoriums. Ideologically, this big roof makes sense for a Black constituency that is very diverse in its beliefs. Color Of Change aspires to represent them broadly, rather than being a niche in the racial justice movement ecosystem. Having many doors for entry also allows COC to provide on-ramps for those not already activated, like low-propensity Black voters.

Scale also brings problems. Maximalist structures

are resource-intensive and risk becoming inertial and bureaucratic. Complexity can make it hard to coordinate across campaigns internally and present a clear narrative outwardly. This complexity can also be disorienting or hard to navigate for members, who may struggle to find their lane.

Color Of Change manages the challenges of scale by tracking members across a matrix of engagement in lieu of a more common ladder of engagement for leadership development. The matrix tracks members' actions and on-ramps into the organization, like digital outreach through email or ads, social media communications, or contact through the field team. For example, someone who signed a petition after George Floyd's murder may have been approached digitally for a donation, while also receiving a text from the field team inviting them to an event. Depending on which path they took, members will "ping off of different sides of the matrix," as Senior Organizing Director Shannon Talbert explains, moving in multiple directions through the organization, rather than one set path.

The advantage of a matrix is that it meets people where they are, particularly in marginalized communities with many obstacles to participation. Whereas a ladder of engagement assumes increasing time commitments by members, a matrix recognizes the many different resources members have to give, rather than hierarchizing certain forms of participation over others. Some are more able to give time and others money -- all are valued. While a matrix is looser than a ladder, COC believes it may be more accessible to those with care or work commitments. Its assumption of ebbs and flows of participation can allow longer-term engagement by protecting members from burn-out.

One of the challenges of a big tent and its many on-ramps, however, is ensuring members experience depth in addition to scale: a sense of political home in specific lanes or pathways within the tent. Color

THE BIG TENT: COLOR OF CHANGE



Of Change's pivot to offline engagement was also a pivot towards relational organizing. It placed belonging as the first goal in its belonging-believing-behaving model for member engagement. In contrast to the Democratic party's transactional, short-term approach to Black voter turnout, COC has prioritized holistic, long-term outcomes: "change that Black people can feel". COC has taken to talking about this in terms of empowering 'Black Joy'. It is telling that COC's first non-electoral offline programs were Black Women's Brunches, which centered Black culture, care, and community-building at x brunches across y cities. COC decided to introduce working class Black women to the organization not through a political pitch or a presentation, but by making each woman the special guest, giving her time to share her vision for her community. "Black Girl Magic", rather than the trauma of ongoing racism, was center stage.

Brunches offered an invitation into a more permanent political home: squads, which balance staff-driven electoral programs with a squad's own local projects. For example, in the 2020 electoral cycle, squads ran general voter programs as well as targeted local campaigns for progressive DAs and prosecutors as part of COC's criminal justice reform

agenda. Outside the electoral cycle, squads have participated in community service events like assembling care packages for incarcerated women. They have also taken up their own autonomous campaigns, like the Los Angeles' squad's successful fight to reopen one of the few farmer's markets in a Black neighborhood.

COC continues to experiment with how to best balance scale and depth, distributed mobilizing and relational organizing, and national coordination and squad autonomy. They are helped by an expanded data team working to better understand membership, clarify different lanes for specific constituencies within the tent, and discover the 'stickiest' on-ramps into the tent that enable long-term member engagement. Preliminary findings indicate that participants who enter COC through a Black joy event like the brunches tend to participate in more relational, transformative events in the future (like squad meetings or courtwatch sessions) than those who enter through a mobilizing, transactional textathon (McKinney Gray, Harris, and Fekade, 2021). This suggests that Black joy events enable relational depth and a feeling of political home, and have the potential to provide sticky pathways for members within COC's massive structure.

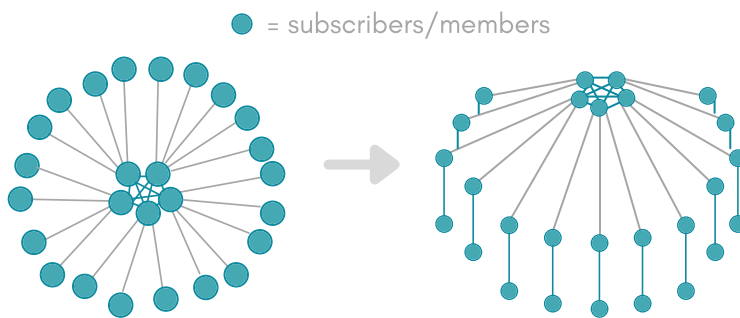




Key Question:

What membership structures hybridize scale and depth?

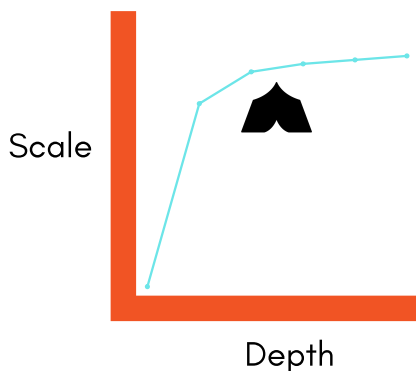
Big Tent: achieves scale through a multi-issue and multi-strategy approach (big roof), as well as many entrypoints (open doors). Achieves depth by building long-term membership structures (lanes or pathways in the tent).



ONLINE TO OFFLINE CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION

Image: adapted from Movement Net Lab

A big tent usually builds scale first
and then depth



Features of a Big Tent

A big tent is a political home whose broad sense of identity is united by a shared culture.

What can a big tent do? Many points of entry offer easy on-ramps for people new to movements.

Ideal conditions for building a big tent?

When a national campaign organization transitions to an offline operation, it can put down stakes to build a big tent. A tent has the spaciousness to accommodate a large diversity of strategies, issues, and constituencies, so long as they are united by a strong culture and shared overarching goal (in COC's case, Black culture and Black liberation).

Opportunities

- On-ramps, potential political home, sense of belonging for many new movement participants
- More established, big player in the ecosystem, can support smaller players

Challenges

- Risks of maximal structures: resource-intensive, inertial, bureaucratic
- Organizational complexity makes it harder for members and staff to navigate organization



SHAPES FOR STAFF

UNITED FOR RESPECT + ISAIAH

ORGANIZATION

United for Respect fights for economic justice through an intersectional lens by organizing retail workers on a national scale. Incubated within a labor union, the organization separated to form an alt-labor non-profit (OUR Walmart) then expanded beyond Walmart to retail more broadly, becoming United for Respect. UFR takes on the “Holy Trinity” of the retail economy: Walmart, Wall Street, and Amazon.

UNITEDfor RESPECT



MEMBERSHIP

United for Respect’s members are retail workers organized through an online-to-offline strategy via Facebook and WorkIt, UFR’s digital platform for AI assisted workplace support. UFR builds overlapping constituencies based on employer, geography, and identity. It channels workers’ energy into respective employer-based, electoral, and policy campaigns.

PIVOT

United For Respect expanded its theory of change beyond Walmart to focus on new corporate, financial, and electoral players. Structurally, it has grown rapidly, reorganizing staff teams and member structures around these new campaigns. It has experimented with both campaign shop and base-building staff structures in search of the best team structure to strengthen member power.

question:

What structures bring multiple theories of change and constituencies ‘under one roof’ in an organization successfully?

THE RUBIK'S CUBE: UNITED FOR RESPECT



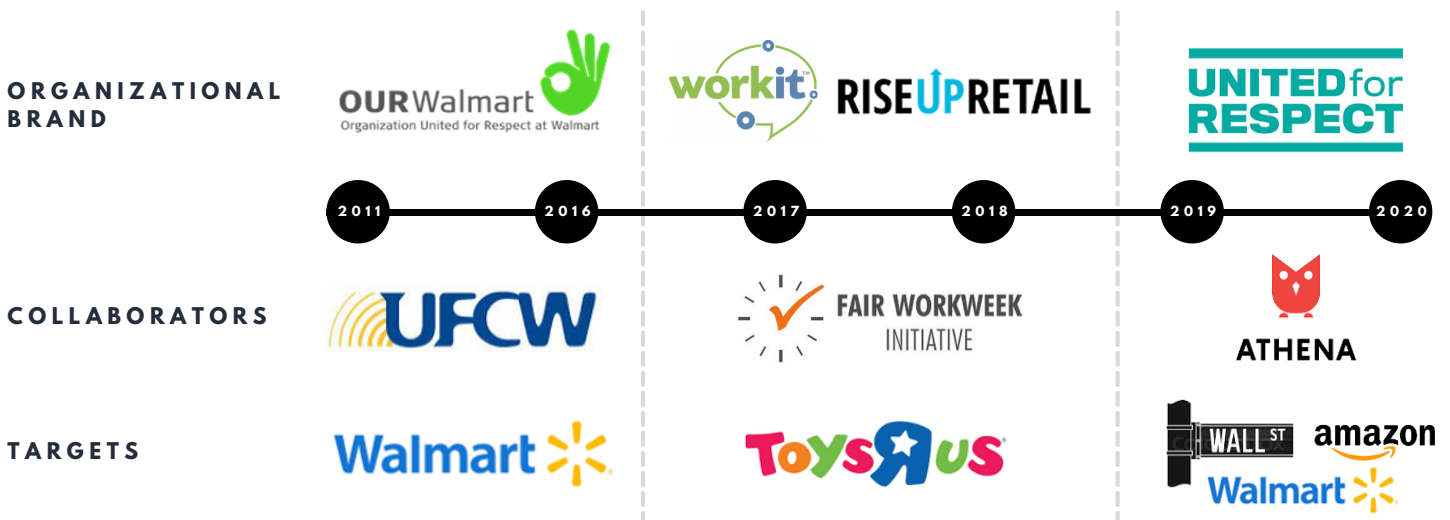
At the onset of the COVID crisis, the discourse about 'essential workers' seemed like a ripe power building opportunity for United for Respect. As one of the few groups organizing workers across retail employers, with big wins against Wall Street and Walmart, UFR was well-positioned to fight back. However, the organization's strengths like growth and scale also had shadow sides, stretching some parts of the organization's membership too thin to rise to the occasion and respond. Learning from these challenges, how is UFR changing its staff structures to strengthen member power for future struggles?

Despite being incubated within a union (United Food and Commercial Workers), UFR has always had an alt-labor approach. Rather than organizing deeply in a singular workplace or geography as traditional labor would, UFR recognized that national, distributed, digital networks among workers were more resilient against employer retaliation. UFR's strategy has thus been a mix of local base-building and national campaigns. The approach worked: the organization's "Respect the Bump!" campaign won half a million full-time Walmart workers the same paternal leave as executives, in addition to pregnancy accommodations and paid time off.

Success encouraged the organization to pivot and extend its networks to new workers from different retail employers. This demanded new structure-strategies. A collaboration with the Center for Popular Democracy's Fair Workweek Initiative added

policy and political power-building to the organization's existing strategic arsenal of corporate campaigns. Together, their Rise Up Retail project won \$22M in severance pay for Toys R Us workers laid off in a Wall Street buyout. That success encouraged the organization to expand its targets beyond Walmart to the central drivers of the retail economy, what they call the "Unholy Trinity" of Amazon, Wall Street, and Walmart.

This rapid growth required more staff, prompting the question: What staff structure can best manage this hybrid of campaigns and base-building? UFR has experimented with two models - grouping staff teams by campaign or by role. These are like different ways of turning a Rubik's cube, creating either a multi-colored or a monochromatic face of the cube. Campaign teams build multi-colored faces: they bring together various roles (organizing, research, digital, policy, etc.) to collaborate on nimble, high-impact national campaigns. Teams support the leadership of members to amplify the reach, scale and impact of their power. In contrast, staff teams grouped by role build monochromatic faces. In particular, this base-building staff model puts all organizers together on a team to sharpen their craft, identify and develop leaders through deep organizing, and connect them with leadership opportunities across the organization and its campaigns and coalitions. There are many ways to turn the Rubik's cube, but which one aligns best with UFR's goals and unique conditions?



THE RUBIK'S CUBE: UNITED FOR RESPECT



Campaign shop staff structure

multiple roles (organizer, communications, digital, etc.) on one campaign team

The first experiment, starting with the Rise Up Retail project, was a campaign shop staff structure. This grouped staff with various roles (organizer, communications, digital, etc.) around a campaign for a specific constituency (Walmart workers, Toys R Us, etc). A campaign approach is agile – it can take advantage of whirlwind political opportunities for high-impact with limited resources. For example, the Toys R Us campaign was won with just one full-time online organizer (with the support of additional campaigners). In terms of building member power, campaigns enable members to engage in powerful tactics and give them access to a loud megaphone. But the fast pace and global scale of campaigns can tend to concentrate strategic decision-making in the hands of staff, creating obstacles to member involvement. In UFR's case, the campaign team structure ultimately created silos, as each team worked with different strategies, structures, and constituencies. Campaigns were not aligned.

So in 2019, leadership underwent a second experiment: reshuffling many teams by role rather than campaign in a base-building staff structure. Most organizers were put together in one department to align them around a shared organizing model. The goal was to bring different organizers and constituencies together, while integrating UFR's different economic, policy, and electoral strategies. A base-building approach builds member power and organizing committees, centering members in the organization's strategic decision-making. Base-building, however, is time



Base-building organization staff structure

teams organized by role (organizer, communications, digital, etc.)

and skill-intensive and raises questions about complexity and coordination at UFR's national scale.

The base-building staff structure also ran into challenges of disalignment, this time between roles rather than campaigns. In the previous staff structure, organizers, their constituencies, and campaigners had built strategy together on one team. Now, strategizing shifted primarily to the Campaigns Department, where it became more disconnected from members who did not have strong organizing committees. Disoriented without a strategic compass, the Organizing Department was building member power but without clarity about what that power was for. The result of UFR's many structure pivots was scale over depth: UFR's teams were set up to offer a little towards many fights, but not ready for the big fight that COVID put in their laps.

After undergoing a recent change in leadership, United for Respect has learned from these experiments and recognized that its hybrid strategy requires a hybrid structure. It is now scaffolding a dual structure with both comprehensive campaign teams and role-based departments, including an Organizing Department. This builds on earlier Walmart and Wall Street organizing where leaders collectively led on strategy and action. While this pivot is ongoing, we cannot speak to its outcomes, but the goal is a combination that can reap the benefits and avoid the pitfalls of both of these staff structures for building member power.



Key Question:

What staff structures build member power?

Rubik's Cube: A hybrid of campaign and base-building staff structures gives staff the flexibility to build member power through multiple strategies simultaneously.

CAMPAIGN AND BASE-BUILDING STAFF ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

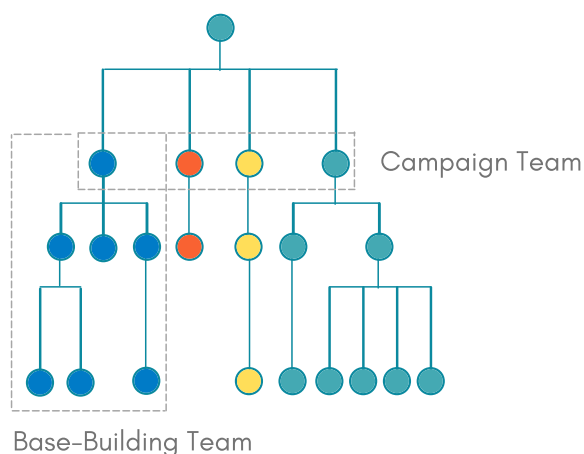


Image: adapted from Movement Net Lab

Features of a Rubik's Cube

A Rubik's Cube is a hybrid of a campaign staff model and a base-building organization staff model.

What can a Rubik's Cube do? The flexibility of hybrid staff teams allows an organization to pursue multiple strategies simultaneously, which may be necessary in the face of retaliation by targets.

Ideal conditions for building a Rubik's Cube? A Rubik's cube can alternate between different strategies (f.e. electoral or workplace organizing), their necessary scopes (national/state/local), and appropriate staff structures (campaign or base-building staff teams). What holds the cube together is a core issue and constituency.

Trade-offs

- Campaigns are agile, high-impact, and achieve scale with few resources. They give members access to a big megaphone.

...But the pace and scale of campaigns risks concentrating strategy in the hands of staff.

- Base-building creates deep, local member power, enabling member participation in strategizing.

...But base-building is time and skill intensive, raising questions about complexity and coordination for scaling to a national level.

ORGANIZATION

ISAIHAH is a multi-issue, faith-based community organization in Minnesota, and a founding member of the alignment formations Minnesotans for a Fair Economy and Our Minnesota Future. In 2016, ISAIHAH built out Faith in Minnesota, a 501(c)(4) that allows it to grow its electoral power.



question:

If non-profit management structures often impede real power-building, how do we structure staff in a way that centers people power?

MEMBERSHIP

Since pivoting, ISAIHAH's membership has expanded from Christian faith communities to new constituencies, including childcare workers, Muslim congregations, and Black barbershops. This has led ISAIHAH to transform from a multi-racial, but predominantly white organization to a genuinely multiracial house with rooms for each different constituency.

PIVOT

In 2015, ISAIHAH recentered its core mission of individual and collective power-building in its organizational culture and structure. The latter entailed a restructuring of the organization to place organizers and their bases at the center of strategic decision-making in the staff organizational chart.



THE HOUSE: ISIAAH



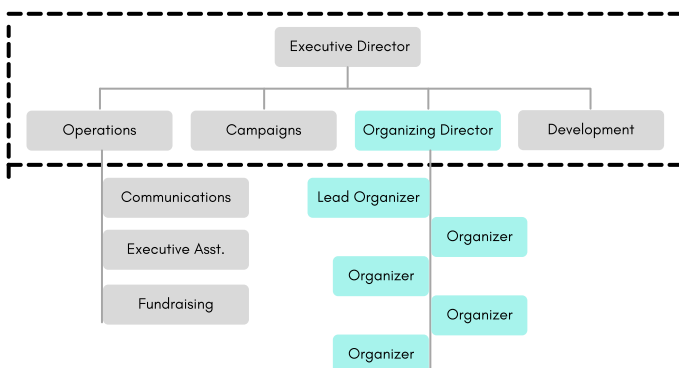
Organizations go through common life-cycles, and those that successfully make it through a period of growth often enter a phase of institutionalization. As a long-standing faith-based community organization founded in the 1990's, ISIAAH has followed a similar trajectory, with growth stalling out by the early 2010's. In this stagnation, strife grew within the organization's internal house. Executive Director Doran Schrantz went against the advice of non-profit manuals and decided to restructure the staff. How did she reimagine the organizational chart, thus enabling ISIAAH's house to grow?

Being at the top of a hierarchical structure often keeps leaders insulated, so they are sometimes the last to find out about problems in their own house. It felt this way for Schrantz, whose encounter with an intern in the parking lot revealed some uncomfortable truths about a competitive culture among her staff. Member leaders also approached her about how they missed "the good old days" of being developed by and engaged in strategy with organizers. Schrantz was shocked and saddened to think her organizers and leaders were not receiving the investment in their agency and growth that she herself had gotten as a young organizer. After a 'dark night of the soul', Schrantz decided that ISIAAH's house was in need of renovation and revitalization. She (re)centered power-building in both the culture and structure of ISIAAH's house.

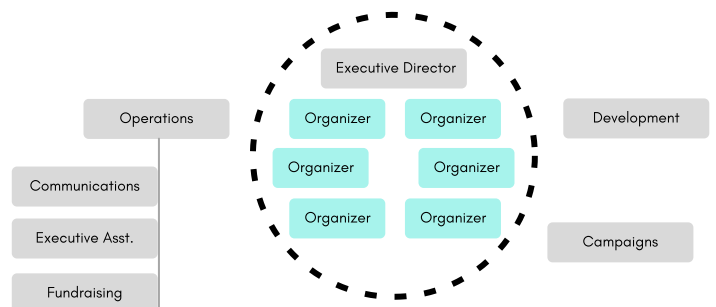
Schrantz diagnosed the organizational dysfunction as rooted in a misunderstanding of power and the role of the organizer, common for non-profit culture. In non-profit structures and management, power often comes from one's position within a hierarchical organization. This definition of power is limited to the internal structure of the organization, and therefore scarce and competitive, since only a few select individuals can make it to the top. One's positional power is the result of performing one's role in a way that builds social capital and internal alliances to facilitate climbing up the ladder. Internally facing, performance-oriented metrics can encourage organizers to lower expectations and avoid risks out of a fear of failure that is often racialized and gendered. Because there is nothing necessarily public or outward-facing about this navel-gazing focus on the organization itself, organizers can start to confuse their public and private selves, relating to colleagues through gossip or their own insecurities.

ISIAAH's struggles were ironically the result of the organization's growth, as an increase in non-organizer staff roles had the unintended consequence of some mission drift. Schrantz wanted ISIAAH to return to its core principles of organizing people power, and for organizers to understand that their power came not from the top down (from hierarchical status) but from the bottom up: from building their base. This model of power is abundant.

2013



2015



How ISIAAH Restructured its Org Chart

KEY:



Strategic decision making



Organizers

THE HOUSE: ISALIAH



The power each organizer builds does not take away from another's power; on the contrary, it gives other organizers and constituencies more leverage, since all constituencies move in concert under ISALIAH's roof. This abundance allows organizers to imagine more for themselves and their constituencies and be opportunistic by taking creative risks. In this orientation away from navel-gazing and towards wider horizons, the organization is not an end in itself, but a vehicle for a larger goal in the external world: building people's agency to wield their power collectively in solidarity with one another.

In order to reset ISALIAH's culture around power, Schrantz reset the structure and reshuffled the organizational chart. Non-profit management approaches suggested she centralize strategic decision-making among the top staff in each competency. But Schrantz remembered the look on her organizers' faces when this team split off at a staff retreat. They were rightfully wondering: "If I'm bringing my base, the source of all our power, to this action or campaign, shouldn't I be in the room to strategize about it as a representative of their interests?"

So Schrantz tossed the non-profit manuals, which offered technocratic solutions to what was fundamentally a power problem. Instead, she redesigned the organization as a set of concentric circles, not a ladder, and placed all ISALIAH's organizers at the center. They became the new strategic decision-making center of the organization, and brought their membership's interests with them to the organizer table. Power became the heart of the house, and a shared culture grounded in multi-racial solidarity and democracy served as the mortar holding the walls together. Other staff roles, like communications and policy, take their strategic guidance from the organizing table. These are like the electricity, plumbing, and roof that serve the whole house.

Schrantz ran the weekly organizer table herself for several years in order to guide the formation of a new culture of individual and collective power-building. This pushed organizers to explicitly overcome their own fears in order to embrace becoming powerful, public leaders. The goal was to develop organizers and, in turn, member leaders able to 'cross the bridge' into public life and political protagonism.

After the pivot in 2015, the organization underwent massive growth, with a dramatic increase in member participation. As organizers felt empowered to take risks, they cut new turf, expanding ISALIAH's base beyond the Twin Cities to rural communities and to new constituencies outside the traditional faith context, like childcare workers, community businesses, tenants, and young people. Highly-motivated organizers of color, including former members, brought in Black and Muslim constituencies, adding new rooms to ISALIAH's house and making it genuinely multiracial.

The house allows each of these new constituencies to decorate its own room with its own strategies, narrative, and culture resonant to its people. The 'commons' room of the house represents the spaces where these constituencies and their organizers meet, like the staff organizer table. A lead organizer uses this common space to ensure that different strategies are coordinated into a 'symphony', allowing ISALIAH to make power moves on the chess board of state politics.

This new diversity and embrace of risk meant the organization was able to meet the Trump era head-on. ISALIAH got serious about the fight for multi-racial democracy and the need for political power independent of the Democratic party, leading to a new addition to the house: a 501(c)(4) called Faith in Minnesota. Faith in Minnesota has drawn ISALIAH's members into electoral programs as part of a path to co-governing power in the state.



Key Question:

What staff structures build member power?

House: Putting organizers at the center of the organizational chart centers their constituencies' interests and power in strategy making.

BASE-BUILDING STAFF ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

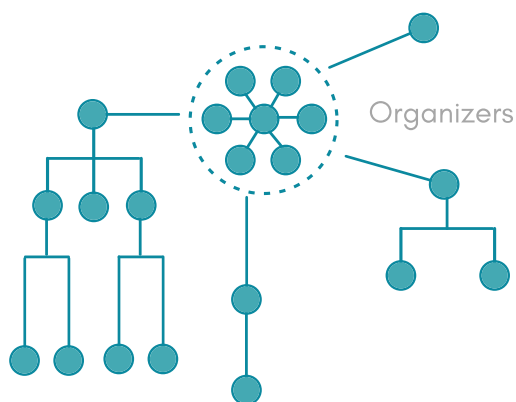


Image: adapted from Movement Net Lab

Features of a House

Each room in a house represents a constituency organized by a staff organizer. Organizers and constituencies meet and strategize in the house commons. Other staff roles function as utilities like plumbing and electricity that serve the house as a whole.

What can a house do? A house allows each organizer and constituency the autonomy of their own room. At the same time, sharing the same roof requires each constituency to coordinate and align their strategies for shared power among all housemates.

Ideal conditions for building a house? A house can accommodate diverse constituencies, and their multiple issues and strategies, so long as they are aligned around building governing power at the regional or statewide level.

Opportunities

- Centering organizers and constituencies in strategizing maximizes member participation and organizer's clarity of mission
- Rooms within the house allow for balance of autonomy and coordination across multi-racial constituencies
- Suited to structure-based organizing where constituencies and rooms are clearly defined

Challenges

- Risks of misalignment can be mitigated by a strong culture
- Organizing is a time and skill intensive craft, requiring seasoned leadership
- Questions about complexity and coordination for scaling to a national level.



SHAPES FOR MOVEMENT ECOLOGIES

WORKING FAMILIES PARTY NY
+ STATEWIDE ALIGNMENT GROUP

ORGANIZATION

The Working Families Party was originally founded in New York and has now expanded to 11 states. The NY chapter is structured like a three-legged stool, with labor unions, 501(c)(4) community organizations, and individual members as the legs who contribute to the party (the seat). NY WFP fields progressive candidates as an officially recognized party with its own ballot line, thus shaping its structure in accordance with state regulations on parties.



MEMBERSHIP

When it was founded, NY WFP was largely a coalition of organizations, who recruited their bases to join the party. However, the party has always had unaffiliated individual members, and new leadership is building out local chapters to expand individual membership. They are also hoping to add a fourth leg to the stool for movement formations that can join the party as squads.



PIVOT

Conflict over endorsements in the gubernatorial race led NY WFP's once stable stool to become wobbly, as labor affiliates asserted their autonomy and jeopardized the overall coordination of the vehicle. The party has since shifted to 'WFP 2.0', with more Black leadership, intersectional ideology, and structural expansions aimed at stabilizing the stool and making it more resilient.

question:

Which structures best bring together the governance and organizing capacities of the party?

THE STOOL: NEW YORK WORKING FAMILIES PARTY



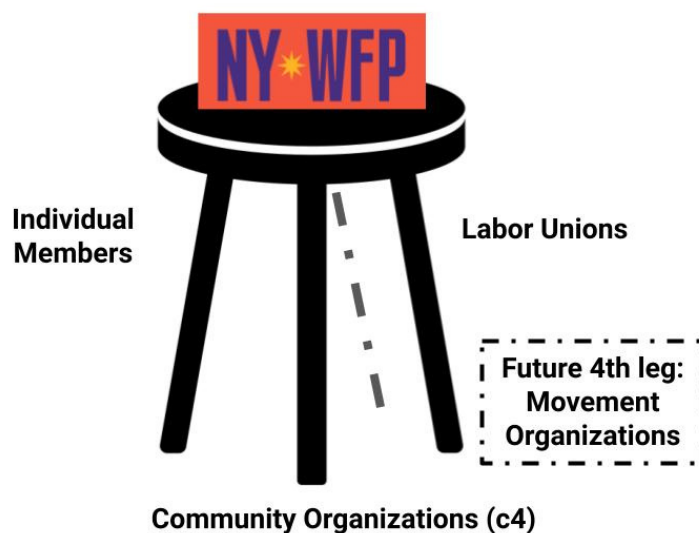
A stool represents a unique type of coalition, one that requires enormous coordination in order to build a permanent, independent structure – in New York Working Families Party’s case, a party. The legs of NY WFP’s coalitional stool include labor, c4 community organizations, and individual members. By the 2010s, the party had door-knocked and hustled its way to being a preeminent electoral force in state politics. By 2018, twenty years after its founding, it had achieved its goal of ousting moderate Democrats who caucused with Republicans, ending their grip on state politics and opening a path for progressive governing power in the state. Yet internally, the party faced its deepest challenges to date – conflict over a gubernatorial endorsement had led its biggest labor partners to jump ship, taking many of the party’s resources with them and leaving the labor leg of the stool wobbly. Fragmentation occurred when the coordination needed for the stool could not contain the conflicts of individual affiliates asserting their autonomy. In response, new Black leadership took the helm nationally and in New York. Their new vision of ‘WFP 2.0’ plans to strengthen and expand the legs of the party’s stool to make it more resilient.

The Working Families founders agitated for a vision of Leftist electoral muscle in the 1990s, a time when third parties were irrelevant and fewer community organizations wanted to get their hands dirty in electoral work. Now nationwide, the party was originally founded in New York, whose unique fusion voting laws allow progressives to run on both the Democratic and the WFP’s ballot lines if they choose, pooling votes. The ballot line gives the party’s big vision a pragmatic tool for leverage in the transactional world of state politics. Unions and c4 community affiliates, two legs of the stool, came together to create an independent structure that could execute coordinated electoral strategy and develop electoral capacities beyond the scope of any individual affiliate. To ensure genuine coordination and limit the dominance of bigger

players, the party developed complex rules to weight votes and dues-shares. Individual members make up the third leg of the stool, which has been somewhat underinvested in over the years. The party has local chapters and clubs for members, mostly in urban areas, whose main job is to interview regional candidates for endorsements, the bread and butter work of the party.

State recognition of the party brings with it state regulation, which imposes structures that can sometimes hamstring the party. In addition to its coalitional structure, the party has a parallel governance structure mandated by law, including a State Committee of elected representatives from each Congressional district. These must be WFP registrants, a status that requires giving up the right to vote in Democratic primaries. As a result, registration is not synonymous with membership and is limited to those willing to take this step.

By far the biggest imposition by state law is the requirement to endorse a gubernatorial candidate, forcing the party to engage in a high-stakes race. This eventually became a wedge between the trade unions, community organizations, and individual members in the party. While some were done with Governor Cuomo’s broken promises and ready to



THE STOOL: NEW YORK WORKING FAMILIES PARTY



primary him from the Left, many unions wanted to work from within and maintain good relationships with his office (with whom some had to collectively bargain).

Whichever way the party went on the endorsement, they nevertheless lost. In 2014, after weighing a challenger but ultimately endorsing Cuomo, many public and some private labor unions left the party. After taking the leap in 2018 to endorse a primary challenger, the other major private sector unions departed as well. The coordination required for the party was upended by affiliates asserting their own autonomy, leaving the stool wobbly. Yet at the same time, in 2018 the party defeated the moderate Democratic bloc that had been giving Republicans a majority at the statehouse. Twenty years after its founding, NY WFP achieved its goal of making New York a genuine trifecta blue state with a pathway to progressive governance. The coalition's structure and strategy had run their course and fulfilled their function, and fragmented in the process.

Though painful, this fragmentation made way for revitalization, as a legacy organization became a start-up again. These externally induced changes paralleled internal changes that gave the party a new direction. Maurice Mitchell was brought in as National Director in 2018 and Sochie Nnaemeka as Director for NY in 2020. The promotion of Black leadership made good on WFP's past promise to take race and gender seriously. Mitchell has ushered in what he calls 'WFP 2.0', capitalizing on a post-Bernie landscape of renewed grassroots interest in electoral power and adding big vision values and intersectionality to WFP 1.0's more sharp-elbowed pragmatism. In New York's version of WFP 2.0, Nnaemeka has kept the party's insider approach of using the ballot line to keep electeds in formation. But she has also emboldened its outsider 'vote you out' strategy for running progressive challengers like Congressman Jamaal Bowman, who primaried a corporate Democrat and won.

Most importantly, WFP 2.0 aims to build a mass party of the multiracial working class, which requires building out the party's third leg: its individual member base. Here the party faces some of the downsides of its high levels of coordination, which can make it top-heavy at times, with a strong organizational structure but lower individual member engagement. Building the individual member base requires strengthening chapters by tapping into the party's capacities to organize and not just to govern. In addition, leadership is imagining a new fourth leg of the party for social movement formations, like tenant unions, abolitionist groups, and Movement for Black Lives activists. As 501(c)(3)s or those without any incorporation status, they are excluded from other electoral ventures and NY WFP hopes to offer them a political home. While the party will need to recalibrate the balance of decision-making power and coordination among these various legs, a four-legged stool can potentially better withstand conflict and change, leaving it better prepared for structure shifts in the future.

While these pivots are too new to assess, NY WFP 2.0 has passed its first existential challenge with flying colors. Facing Cuomo's new hurdle, an increase in the number of votes required to maintain their ballot line in 2020, the party received more than twice as many votes as needed, proving it is here to stay.





Key Question:

What ecosystem formations balance autonomy and coordination?

Stool: builds an independent vehicle (seat of the stool) that requires high coordination at some expense to affiliate autonomy. Building multiple types of affiliates (legs of the stool) can promote resilience in the face of conflict and change.

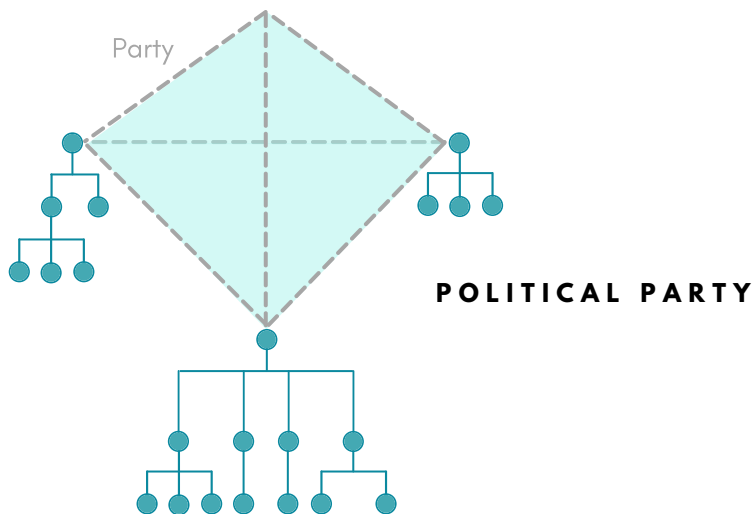
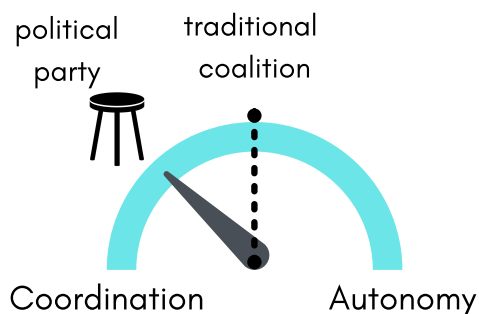


Image: adapted from Movement Net Lab

Higher Coordination, Lower Affiliate Autonomy



Features of a Stool

A stool is a coalition where affiliated organizations (the legs of the stool) build a permanent, independent structure (the seat of the stool). In WFP NY's case, this independent structure is a recognized third party.

What can a stool do? Stools execute coordinated strategy and develop organizational capacities beyond the scope of individual affiliates.

Ideal conditions? A stool brings together diverse constituencies focused on various issues, who align towards a shared aim of progressive governing power and a shared strategy of electoral campaigns. Ideal scope is statewide, though WFP shows the value of networking state chapters into a national party.

Trade-offs: Higher coordination, lower affiliate autonomy

- Greater visibility of brand
...but this can make vehicle a public target
- Transparent and accessible decision-making structures
...which can also become bureaucratic and proceduralist
- Strength of independent vehicle
...but also conflict around member autonomy
- Resource-intensiveness of an independent vehicle can create dependency on affiliate resources without member dues

ORGANIZATION

The StateWide Alignment Group (SWAG) formed in 2014 to collectivize the capacities of several state organizations in Florida. Their leaders make up this behind-the-scenes formation, which has developed independent vehicles and collaborations as needed. SWAG has recently developed a public brand for its electoral programs through a new 501(c)(4), Florida for All, and accompanying 501(c)(3).



MEMBERSHIP

SWAG consists of six affiliate organizations focused on labor, electoral, faith-based, Black and Brown youth, and immigrant rights organizing. Rather than building an independent base, SWAG and its c3 and c4 programs draw on their affiliate organizations' bases, respecting each constituency's own lane or approach.

PIVOT

The formation of SWAG was a strategic and structural 'leveling up' for affiliate organizations. It allowed for the creation of shared state-wide campaigns around a ten year theory of change. It has built collective infrastructure for communications, leadership development and political education, field operations, electoral programs, and policy and lobbying at the capitol.

question:

What kinds of joint vehicles can movement ecosystem formations build together?

THE FRACTAL: STATEWIDE ALIGNMENT GROUP



When leaders from six organizations in Florida began meeting in 2014 to talk about how to stop competing for funding and start winning in a trifecta red state, they could not have dreamed that a few years later they would build a number of collective vehicles and a 501(c)(4) together. How did they 'level up' to this degree of collaboration? SWAG has built a repeating pattern of alignment between its affiliates at different scales, both geographic (local, regional, and statewide) and structural (between leaders, staff, and members of different organizations). This fractal shape allows affiliates to move collectively towards shared long-term power-building goals, while respecting each organization's autonomy.

SWAG is an alignment formation, rather than a coalition. While SWAG affiliate organizations sit at and value state coalition tables, they wanted to dream bigger than a single issue or electoral cycle. Their vision of power went beyond a narrow vision of policy and electoral wins to include the progressive infrastructure and ideology to secure and institutionalize them, like think tanks, sustainable funding, and media. This would require resilient relationships that could survive many campaign cycles and "lose forward", or embrace short-term losses that enable future wins. One of SWAG's initial goals was relational: to not only win together but to do so in a way that ensured everyone could still talk to each other afterwards. Inspired by other alignment groups like the Ohio Organizing

Collaborative and Minnesotans for a Fair Economy, they set out on a path to alignment.

They started with relationship building rather than institution building. They were inspired by Patrick Lencioni's work on the culture needed to fix team dysfunction: trust through vulnerability, addressing conflict, collective commitment, holding one another accountable, and attention to results. Rather than pitching a big tent to maximize the number of groups in collaboration, SWAG went a mile deep rather than a mile wide. The alignment was built among a smaller, more exclusive set of organizations, but one that still represented a wide range of constituencies, including labor, immigrant, Black and Brown youth, and faith communities. This also allowed for an uncompromising vision because affiliates could choose to build only with organizations where they saw potential for long-term alignment.

SWAG developed a shared ten-year theory of change to orient themselves around a common North Star. This led them to embark on shared ballot initiatives, policy campaigns, and independent expenditure campaigns. As they walked this external path to power, they simultaneously scaffolded internal structures, sharing communications, research, and management infrastructure. They also built collective vehicles for lobbying and policy capacity at the capitol, a political education and leadership development program for all organizations' members, and a field operations vendor for voter programs.



Alignment

vs

Coalition



- Movement focused, cross sector
- Power: wins, infrastructure, ideology
- Long-term power building, relational
- Building (and willing to "lose forward")
- Fewer groups: trust-building but exclusive
- Stealth, nimble space/process - not new entity
- Decentralized division of labor: orgs execute in own lane with own organizing model

- Issue focused
- Electoral and policy wins
- Short-term campaigns, instrumental
- Winning together what you can't win alone
- Broad, big tent, maximum # of groups
- Formal, centralized, branded, sometimes rigid entity
- Building shared strategy and shared lane: meet-in-the-middle compromise

THE FRACTAL: STATEWIDE ALIGNMENT GROUP



However, this coordination was careful to respect each affiliate's autonomy. Whereas a coalition model might seek to get everyone in the same lane, this can sometimes end up making a lane so wide that it is watered down by compromise. By allowing for "operational unity and tactical differences" (Andrea Mercado, Florida Rising), SWAG has allowed diversity in organizing models, membership structures, and tactics to live side-by-side without competition. Different organizations step up to take the lead on different projects. This division of labor allows the alignment to pool strategic capacity at a statewide level but execute in their own lane. Tensions are constantly navigated between organizational autonomy and collective alignment. Executive Directors of affiliate organizations sometimes describe feeling as though they run two organizations. Yet at the same time, SWAG has helped leaders clarify their lane and relieved them of the burden of 'doing it all'. In one case, two affiliates saw that their lanes should merge, leading to the formation of Florida Rising in 2021.

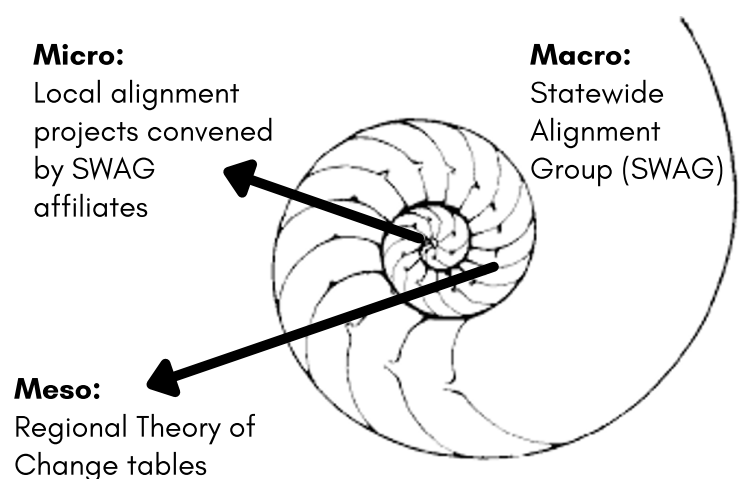
Coalition structures can sometimes be bulky and rigid, as centralization is resource-intensive, particularly when branding a new entity. SWAG has been careful not to overstructure or overstaff, building only what is necessary to support their ongoing process, relationships, and values. SWAG decided not to coalesce into a new entity, but to remain a nimble, stealth formation. It is a space to build what individual organizations cannot accommodate in their own existing structures: "collective capacity jointly owned and directed" (Eric Brakken, co-founder).

SWAG's alignment functions as a fractal from the statewide ('wholesale') down to the local ('retail') levels, showing the model's ability to scale up and down as needed. At the regional level, SWAG has replicated its alignment model by convening 8 regional theory of change tables. These mini-SWAG alignment tables bring together both regional

SWAG affiliates and other organizations, serving as an entry point for new organizations into SWAG's ecosystem and making the alignment more permeable at lower levels. Locally, the alignment approach has also filtered down into SWAG affiliate organizations. Denise Diaz, Executive Director of Central Florida Jobs with Justice, described a coalition her organization built regarding policing in schools. Rather than seeing a conflict between the white PTA Moms and the abolitionist Black and Brown youth in the coalition, she suggested an alignment around an insider-outsider strategy where each group can play to their own strengths so long as neither undermines the other.

In the 2020 election cycle, SWAG decided their stealth was not worth the political capital they were losing by having to rebrand their electoral programs each cycle. SWAG built a c4 formation, Florida For All (FFA) as an independent political organization to advance their mission of winning governing power in Florida. SWAG continues as an alignment table, neither external nor internal to FFA or any of its affiliates, ready to spin off new collective vehicles as needed.

SWAG's Fractals of Alignment





Key Question:

What ecosystem formations balance autonomy and coordination?

Fractal: Maximizes affiliate autonomy and seeks to build coordination in new ways through relational processes of alignment at multiple scales, both geographic (local, regional, statewide) and structural (among leadership, staff, and members).

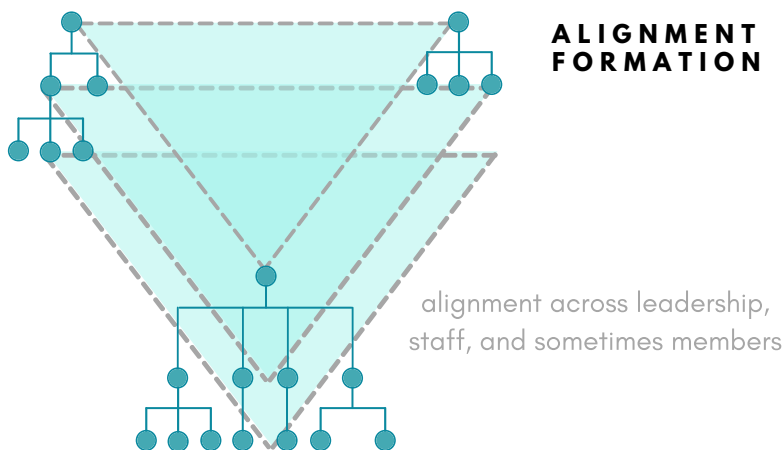
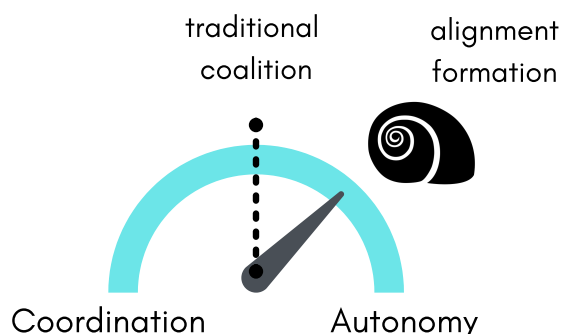


Image: adapted from Movement Net Lab

Lower Coordination, High Affiliate Autonomy



Features of a Fractal

A fractal is a structure of collaboration that aligns the goals, capacities, and strategic action of several organizations towards shared long-term power-building. In a fractal, a repeating pattern of alignment happens between organizations at different scales, both geographically (f.e. local, regional, statewide) and structurally (between leaders, staff, or members of different organizations).

What can a fractal do? By aligning through relationship-building rather than institution-building, a fractal only builds shared vehicles as necessary. This allows fractals to be more stealth, decentralized, and nimble, and less rigid and resource-intensive, than traditional coalitions.

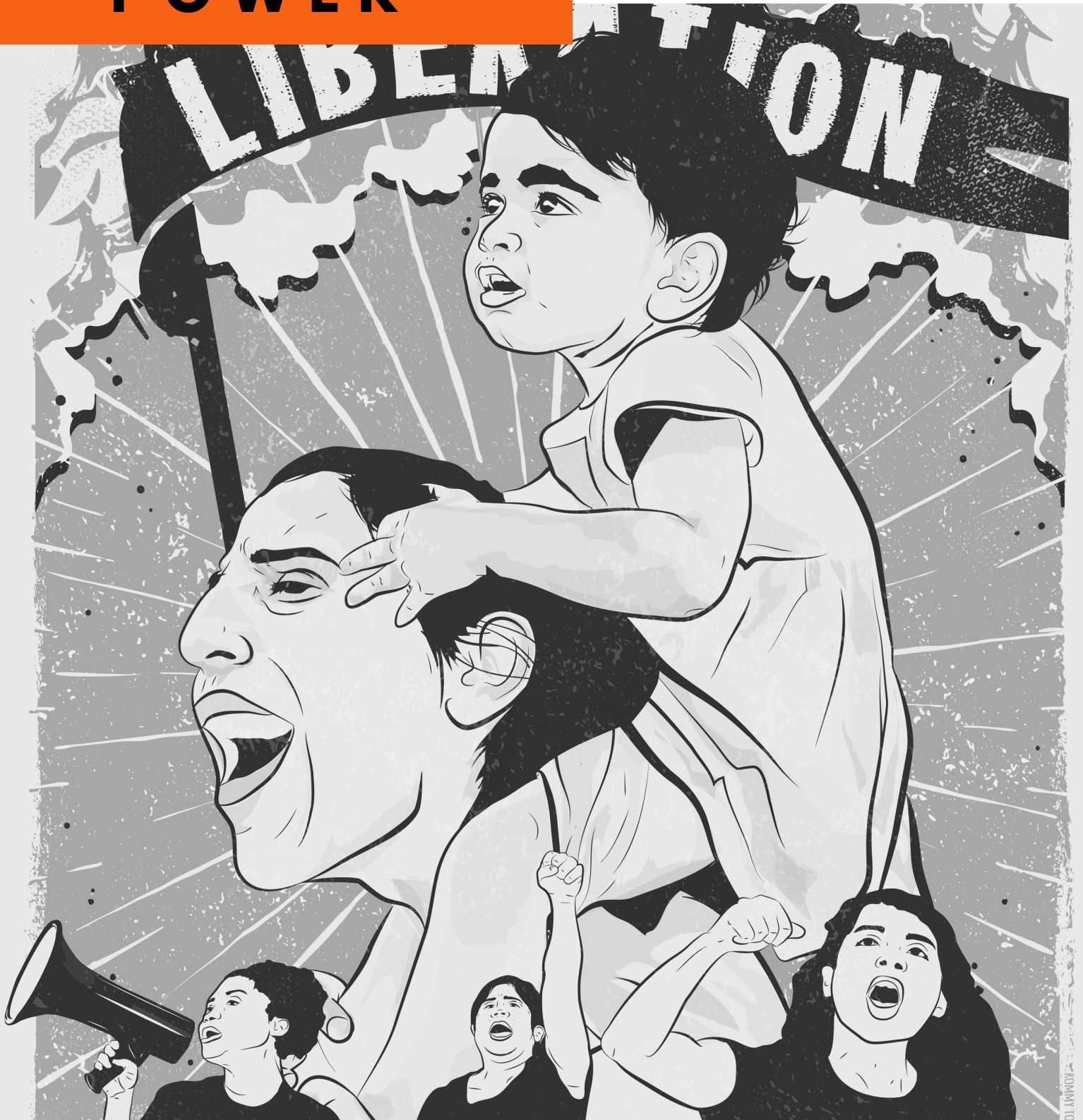
Ideal conditions for building a fractal? A fractal can bring together a range of constituencies, issues, scopes, and strategies so long as there is a will to alignment. This willingness could be triggered by external losses or internal motivation among leaders.

Trade-offs: Lower coordination, higher affiliate autonomy

- Stealth/covert approach ensures nimbleness ...but also lacks transparency
- Smaller cohort of affiliates is easier to align ...but makes decision-making less participatory and more exclusive
- More agility and less conflict or compromise when affiliates can execute in their own lane ...but risk of mission drift or misalignment

SHAPING

POWER



BUILDING STRUCTURE SHAPES

WHAT CAN SHAPES DO?

Structure shapes help visualize the complex trade-offs movement leaders wrestle with when structuring their organizations. But what is the ultimate goal leaders hope to reach when managing tensions between scale and depth, staff and membership, and autonomy and coordination? What do structure shapes enable an organization to do? The organizations in our study all seek to build power for their constituencies. So, what structure shapes build that constituency power, both internally within the organization and externally in their communities? In this section, I show how structures in our case studies can facilitate multiracial membership and member participation and accountability in an organization. These forms of constituency power built internally within an organization can be leveraged externally to build political power in constituents' communities, workplaces, and in government.

Why examine these three threads of interest (multiracial membership, member participation and accountability, and political power)? These themes emerged again and again in our cases and working group discussions, likely because they reflect an underlying hypothesis: that organizations which build internal power through high participation of and strong accountability to a multiracial membership can exercise greater external political power.

While it is beyond the scope of the research to test this hypothesis and link specific power outcomes to particular shapes, this report does offer some reflections on how structure shapes have facilitated these forms of internal and external power. I do so by zooming out to typologize trends across the cases, putting the organizations in dialogue with one another. The diagrams on the following pages offer a visual summary of what will be discussed in this section of the report.

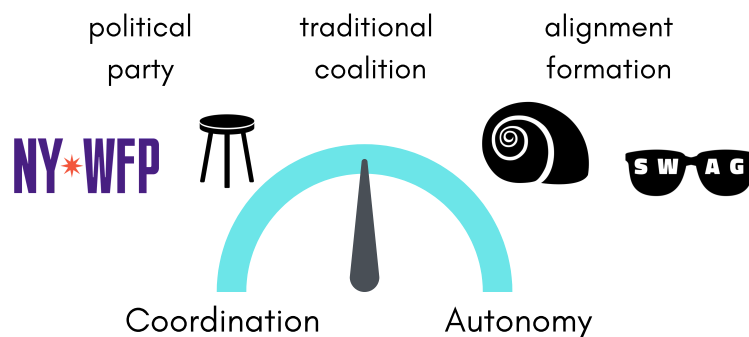
MEMBER PARTICIPATION + ACCOUNTABILITY

Shape	Feature	Case
	Formal democratic structures	
	Community organizing + leadership development	
  	Distributed membership	  

MULTIRACIAL MEMBERSHIP

Shape	Feature	Case
  	Local membership structures	 
	Resourcing marginalized communities	
  	Racially separate and cross-racial spaces	  

POLITICAL POWER



MEMBER PARTICIPATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Behind the money and the spreadsheets, the substance of an organizational structure is the relationships it scaffolds. The organizations profiled in this project are all seeking to build a particular kind of relationship: authentic, accountable relationships between people building progressive power together. Robust member participation is a sign that an organizational form is capable of scaffolding many of these relationships successfully.

Yet each of the case study organizations has wrestled in their own way with how to build these relationships within the limits of the non-profit form. Organizations nevertheless innovate ways to build their members' power to participate internally within the governance of the organization. What structure shapes enable this? I draw on our case studies to develop a typology of three approaches to participation and accountability:

Shape	Feature	Case
	Formal democratic structures	
	Community organizing + leadership development	
  	Distributed membership	  

Formal Democratic Structures

At first glance, internal representative democracy appears to be the ideal decision-making structure to promote a base’s participation in an organization and the organization’s accountability to its base. Cross-class democratic organizations, with federated chapters and elected representatives at local, state, and federal levels, were common in the U.S. until the 1960s (Skocpol 2003). The rise of identity and issue-specific advocacy groups in conjunction with the predominance of the non-profit industrial complex has led to a decline in internal democratic self-governance, with the exception of the labor movement and select organizations like the Sierra Club and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. But the recent, precipitous growth of the Democratic Socialists of America signals that direct democratic internal governance remains a viable avenue for building mass organizations. In the majority of our case studies, organizations use formal voting among members only rarely, for example for electoral endorsements. Thus, further research and different case studies are needed to better understand the rich variety of structures available for democratic self-governance.

Shape	Feature	Opportunities	Challenges	Case
	Formal democratic process	One voice, one vote – fair, equal, transparent	Risks of proceduralism + closed membership	

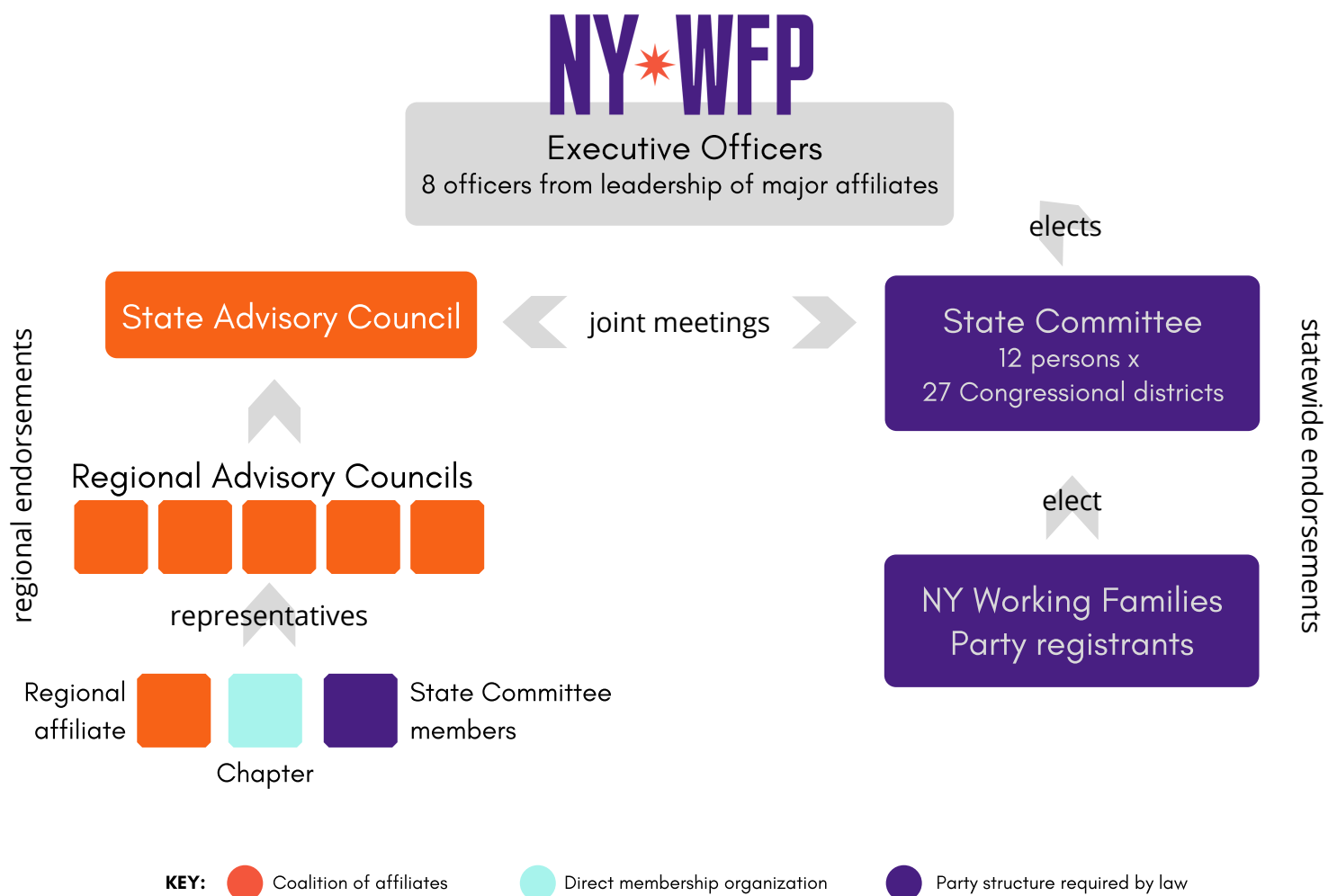
Nonetheless, the structure shape of the stool, and the case of the New York Working Families Party, serves as an exception in this research. One way stools can achieve the high level of coordination characteristic of their shape is through formal democratic structures. In NY WFP’s case, the party is modeled on electoral rather than non-profit structures, and New York state law dictates that it have formal voting systems for internal governance.

Some of the benefits of voting are its fairness in giving equal weight to all member voices and its openness through transparent processes for decision-making. There are potential trade-offs, however. Formal voting structures often require organizations to formalize their membership to determine who can vote. This can build commitment but also foreclose more accessible on-ramps for marginalized communities. For example, the New York Working Families Party’s legal structure only permits party registrants to vote for the party’s State Committee. But party registration is not synonymous with membership: WFP registrants must give up registration for the Democratic party, a strategic step not every member is willing to take. Just as non-profit structures replicate corporate logics, electoral structures replicate inequities in electoral law. The party’s State Committee is made up of 12 people from each of 27 Congressional districts. By mirroring Congressional districting, the State Committee also inherits racialized

gerrymandering, and fails to represent voices of color in urban areas equally.

How can a stool structure around these limitations? In NY WFP's case, the party built its own parallel coalitional structure to give all dues-paying party members a vote on certain decisions, making participation more accessible. Because a formal approach of 'one member, one vote' does not allow for equity between large and small affiliates, the party has also developed its own complex rules for affiliate organizations' vote and dues share to balance these partners.

Robust internal democracy requires transparent decision-making, but our case studies suggest that this must also be embodied by a culture of accountable and authentic relationships between people who are navigating risk, conflict, and contradiction together. Learnings from this research suggest that formalized democratic structures without this culture may face the risk of becoming bureaucratic and proceduralist. A culture of rules over relationships may seem equitable on the surface, but may permit systems of oppression, hierarchies, and sharp-elbowed power plays to continue underneath. One way that NY WFP has strengthened the health of its organizational culture is by reframing the party as a political home, rather than an instrumental electoral coalition.



The Community Organizing Tradition of Leadership Development

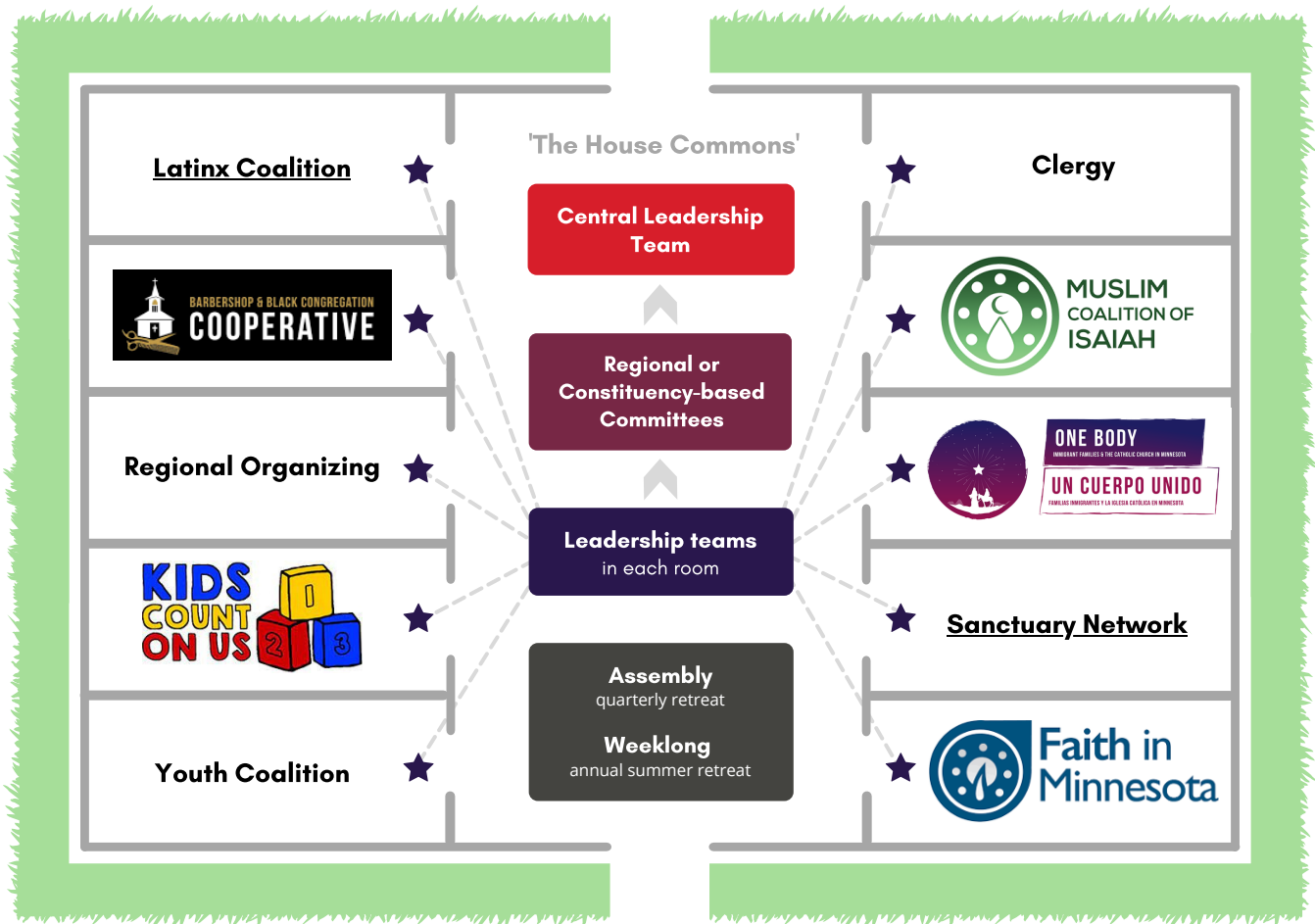
The structure shape of the house also endeavors to build a feeling of political home for its members. It draws on the community organizing tradition where unique constituencies can build and govern their own rooms in the house. In this tradition, formal democratic structures of voting are replaced by a leadership development process facilitated by professional organizers. Through this process, member leaders are equipped with skills to build consensus and participate in setting the strategic course of the organization. This includes strategizing for both their own constituency-specific rooms, as well as the organization as a whole through meetings in the house ‘commons’. Among staff, organizers may serve as informal representatives of their constituencies, though their ability to do so well will vary depending on their training and the culture of the organization.

Coming out of this genealogy of community organizing, ISAI AH has some classic membership structures within and across its bases to ensure member participation and the intensive cultivation of leaders by organizers. But in the early 2010s, despite having these solid structures in place, member participation was not robust. As with formal democratic structures, culture appears as necessary as structure for building democratic participation among members. The case studies suggest that the skeleton of an organization’s structure must be enlivened by the beating heart of a healthy culture where participation is a positive overall experience.

Shape	Feature	Opportunities	Challenges	Case
	Community organizing + leadership development	Prepares leaders to build consensus together	Time and skill intensive	

In ISAI AH’s house, power is understood as abundant and generated from the bottom up, through members’ participation. This stands in contrast to a top-down concept of power as centered in charismatic leaders or the ability to sway elites. In 2015, ISAI AH underwent twinned structure and culture pivots to recenter individual and collective power-building at the heart of the organization’s mission. The new strategic orientation coming out of this pivot was a series of electoral ventures that grew and developed ISAI AH’s membership more than ever before. For example, before the pivot, the organization participated in ballot initiative in 2012. It brought its large member base to the campaign, but staff did not ask much of them – simply to take shifts calling voters. In contrast, after its pivot, ISAI AH embarked on a 2018 Governor’s race that was wildly more demanding. Member leaders hosted house meetings to develop a ‘faith agenda’ and then became delegates at party caucuses to advance that agenda.

Member Leader Development in ISAIAH 's House



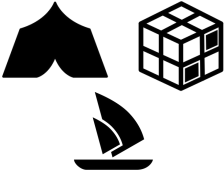
In ISAIAH's community organizing leadership development model, organizers invest enormous time and energy into developing member's leadership and strategic capacity. Members then replicate that process through a snowflake model, building agency in their own communities. ISAIAH's 2018 faith caucus strategy required member leaders to organize a squad of supporters to show up at caucuses and vote them forward as delegates. The complexity of the caucus process demonstrates ISAIAH's approach to electoral strategy as an avenue to bring member leaders into a high-level strategic 'conspiracy' and teach them how to organize their own base.

However, the intense investment of time and skill demanded for leadership development can be a challenge to scale for national organizations. This could potentially limit the ability of a house shape to grow beyond a regional or statewide scope.

Distributed membership for national organizations

In order to scale, the national, digital-forward organizations in our study have crafted more distributed membership structures, represented by the Rubik's cube, boat, and big tent shapes.

These often rely less on time-intensive leadership development via 1:1 relationships with organizers and more on digital tools that can grow member engagement more quickly. Such distributed structures presume a high degree of self-organization and networking among members, requiring a vast digital infrastructure whose architecture is often not designed for people power or accountability to users. The Rubik's cube shape hybridizes base-building with campaigns, which are particularly reliant on social media and digital engagement for their successes. United for Respect, for example, uses Facebook to build resilient distributed networks among workers nationally rather than building deeply in a singular and more vulnerable geography or workplace, as traditional labor models have done. In terms of scale, their model was able to land a huge win for laid off Toys R Us workers – \$22M in severance and structural changes like the creation of a worker 'mirror board'. This was accomplished with just one full-time digital organizer, serving as the hub of a leaderful member campaign. But digital membership structures are subject to the "digital affordances" of the platforms they use: the modes of engagement a specific platform allows, prevents, and shapes. For instance, Facebook is not well set up for relational, leader-led, or distributed organizing, working at an additive and not exponential rate. This can recenter power with staff organizers and limit member leadership. In addition, Facebook's algorithms reproduce inequity and the digital divide shapes who has access to the Internet at all.

Shape	Feature	Opportunities	Challenges	Case
	Distributed membership	Member autonomy, may be more accessible	Disalignment between national and local, staff and members	

Building a pipeline to move member engagement from online to offline helps get around some of these limitations and enable the deep face-to-face organizing that is so successful in community organizing approaches. The big tent shape aims to build a political home that can span both online and offline spaces, allowing members to move seamlessly between them. Color Of Change is an example of a big tent, a large mobilizing operation that has recently built out a longer-term and higher-participation offline membership infrastructure of squads in cities with large Black communities throughout the Northeast, South, and West. COC was inspired by distributed voter programs popularized by the Obama campaign's neighborhood teams and the Bernie Sanders presidential campaigns, but didn't want members isolated at

their screens. Thus, they resource squads and others to organize distributed events that also build face-to-face community. For instance, they have sent toolkits with supplies or gift certificates for food to resource members to self-organize a backyard care package assembly event or a textathon among friends. Color Of Change's squads are coordinated by regional organizers, but the organization is considering new structures that can expand squad self-sufficiency, perhaps through a dues-paying membership structure to resource squad projects, a national convention (a vision postponed by the pandemic), or a national member-led governance structure to set squad priorities.

Distributed membership structures aim to give greater strategic decision-making autonomy to local groups, but this autonomy can also create subsequent struggles around alignment between staff and members or local and national strategy. Sunrise's boat structure shape was designed on Momentum's model specifically to solve some of these tensions: to use a shared movement DNA to tether a small staff organization (the boat's hull) to large decentralized member hubs (the boat's sails). Sunrise's model of democratic decision-making respects member autonomy by allowing hubs to "vote with their feet" on their participation in national campaigns. However, after Sunrise's boat caught the whirlwinds of political momentum, the ropes tethering staff and membership have been under greater stress. In response, the organization has innovated a number of ways to better connect hubs to each other and staff.

Distributed membership models typically have a looser sense of membership than formally democratic dues-paying membership or the long-term cultivated relationships of community organizing. Having such open doors can limit member commitment and sense of belonging, but may also provide wider or more on-ramps to members. In some cases, a lower bar to entry can be more accessible, particularly for marginalized people, than the high-bar asks of more formal or closed membership.

CORE COMPONENTS OF SUNRISE

HUBS

Hubs are the fundamental unit of organization within Sunrise and carry out the most important work of our movement. Any three people can start a hub in their area.



CONNECTING HUBS

Hubs are connected both with each other and with the centralized programs. These connection methods include:

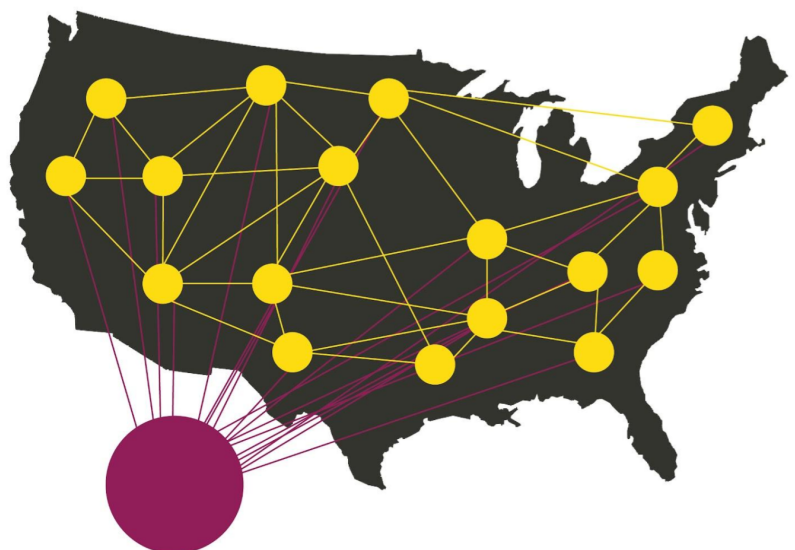
- Role networks
- Regional coaching networks
- Constituency networks
- Hub Advisory Council



CENTRALIZED PROGRAMS

Sunrise has a number of centralized programs which support the coordination and effectiveness of our fight. These programs are:

- The Movement Support Team
- Movement Volunteer Teams
- Mass Trainings
- Field Team



MULTIRACIAL MEMBERSHIP

If organizational forms are ways of structuring relationships between members, particularly authentic, accountable relationships between people who are building power together, then what structures enable that kind of relationship-building across racial difference? This research indicates that many organizations aspire to build political homes for their members to provide a structural foundation for relationships across race, class, and other differences. Ideally, these structures function as containers that can withstand the tumult of conflict and contradiction by cultivating strong bonds of solidarity and trust among members. Since the non-profit form has been dominated by white and middle to upper-class professionals, many organizations struggle to transform non-profits into political homes that are welcoming to Black people, indigenous people, and people of color. How do structure shapes enable that?

A structure only becomes a home when it is given life by a healthy organizational culture. Several of the case studies demonstrated that shared culture can serve as a glue across different racialized constituencies, serving as the “best decentralized command and control” (Ben Chin, Maine People’s Alliance). While it is beyond the scope of this report, future research should explore the best organizational cultural practices that promote political home-making.

Shape	Feature	Case
  	Local membership structures	  
	Resourcing marginalized communities	
  	Racially separate and cross-racial spaces	  

Local Membership Structures

Several organizations in this study have made pivots towards organizing ‘close to home’. They view local membership structures and a complementary strategy of deep relational organizing as the best pathway to building political homes in Black and Brown communities. How do different structure shapes enable local organizing?

"...more decentralization, localization, and deep organizing will support a more multi-racial and cross-class movement."

**– Multi-Racial, Cross-Class Working Group,
Sunrise Movement**

The stool describes a coalition of organizations building an independent vehicle for their shared aims. Stools are only as diverse as the membership of their affiliate organizations, unless they decide to build their own base, as the New York Working Families Party has done. How can they ensure that base is multiracial? The decision to build an independent, multi-racial base is the product of WFP’s pivots at both a national and New York chapter level from a predominantly white to a Black-led ‘2.0’ iteration of the party. These shifts have expanded the party’s aspirations from being a strategic instrument for existing organizations towards becoming a space of belonging for members. The NY party is building out two structures that offer

opportunities to grow membership in communities of color. The first strengthens an existing but often overlooked leg of the stool: individual members in local chapters. This is aided by national level investments in welcome meetings and orientation for new members, which sets the stage for individual members to have a deeper experience of political home. The second approach is to build out a new leg on the stool for non-501(c)(4) movement groups, like local tenant’s unions or abolitionist groups, that would like to join the party as squads. Since Black and Brown movements have less access to c4 infrastructure and funding, a squad structure would give organizations that currently lack electoral firepower access to WFP as a vehicle to extend their current organizing in the electoral realm.

The big tent is capacious enough to allow many constituencies and many lanes or styles of political engagement to coexist, including those that focus on local relational organizing. In Color Of Change’s transition from online campaigns to offline organizing, it developed two new and complementary structures to scaffold face-to-face engagement: a PAC for electoral programs and local squads for longer term organizing. The PAC has been able to harness electoral enthusiasm and funnel it into longer-term organizing in squads founded in key Black cities throughout the Northeast, South, and West. Squad’s balance COC’s national campaign priorities with their own local work to benefit their communities, like the Los Angeles squad’s successful fight to get one of the only farmer’s markets in a Black neighborhood reopened during the pandemic.

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Local chapters are a key feature of the boat structure shape, whose large sails of decentralized chapters are roped together to a hull consisting of the centralized national staff. However, the success of catching the whirlwinds of political weather has caused blowback effects for Sunrise's boat: bloating the hull through rapid staff growth and creating tension on the ropes connecting local chapters to national staff. Against the backdrop of a white-dominated environmental movement, the tension between staff and chapters has been racialized: though Sunrise's national staff is racially diverse, its mobilizing strategy has been associated with whiteness. A new generation of Sunrise leadership aims to give more autonomy and support for chapters to organize locally, based on the conviction that a strategy of "more decentralization, localization, and deep organizing will support a more multi-racial and cross-class movement" (Multi-Racial, Cross-Class Working Group, Sunrise Movement).

"We don't want or need these new people, their first introduction to Color of Change being that they need to work, right? We want regular working-class Black women to come, sit, enjoy themselves, have a good time, and just have a luxurious experience."

– Jade Magnus Ogunnaike, Color Of Change

Resourcing Multiracial Political Homes

One theme across our case studies was the struggle to better resource the participation of marginalized constituents by dismantling organizational incentives to those with privilege and organizational barriers to marginalized groups.

Color Of Change has made resourcing its Black constituents, particularly Black women, central to its approach to building a political home. When the organization pivoted from online to offline community building, its first arc of programming after the 2016 election was the Black Women's brunch. Color Of Change conceived of the brunch as a curated experience of 'Black Girl Magic'. Their litmus test for the event's design was: Could my mother do this? Could a single, working mother do this? Thus, brunches resourced Black women with delicious food, childcare, and parking at no cost. Jade Magnus Ogunnaike, who piloted the first brunches, shared, "We don't want or need these new people, their first introduction to Color Of Change being that they need to work, right? We want regular working-class Black women to come, sit,

enjoy themselves, have a good time, and just have a luxurious experience.” The organization has continued to organize Black joy events focused on mutual aid to Black communities, like delivering personal protective equipment to community members or assembling care packages for incarcerated women. This values the often unrecognized forms of political engagement, the kitchen table politics, community service, and care work, that Black women have historically held in Black political homes as “bridge leaders” (Robnett 1996) linking communities and organizations.

Structuring Cross-racial Collaboration

Lastly, the structure shapes in this study offer models for both cross-racial collaboration and for racialized communities to organize separately. Some models, like the house and the big tent, can accommodate both separate and cross-racial spaces under the roof of a single organization. The stool and the fractal, on the other hand, allow affiliate organizations to hold space for specific racialized constituencies and enable cross-racial collaboration at a broader movement ecosystem level.

When a large online campaign organization puts stakes in the ground to establish an offline organizing presence, the big tent it builds offers a real-life political home. This can bring the organization’s multiracial membership into greater face-to-face contact, as well as potential conflict. To facilitate better collaboration, Color Of Change has created separate lanes within its tent for Black members, such as Black joy themed events like Black Women’s Brunches and Black Dad’s Cookouts. After the Black Lives Matter uprisings in 2020, an influx of millions of new subscribers joined the organization, the majority of whom are non-Black. In response, COC built out a national online education program for non-Black allies to help them find their place within the organization. COC has continued to center Black issues and maintain its Black base amidst this multiracial expansion, however, by understanding itself as a multi-racial organization centered on a shared mission of empowering Black joy.

The house model enables different constituencies, including communities of color, to have separate rooms within a shared organization where they can pursue the strategies most fitting to their communities and build a culture most resonant with their membership. In addition to separate rooms, ISALAH’s house also creates separate leadership development spaces. These focus on developing members’ own stories, sense of agency, and ‘mission’ and then linking that self-interest to a collective destiny. At the beginning of every meeting of ISALAH’s staff organizers, they are asked about their base’s self-interest, the stakes of the power path they are strategizing for their base, and the costs of not leading. Leadership development of organizers and member leaders of color supports them in ‘crossing the bridge’ from feelings of powerlessness to political protagonism. As one Black organizer shared, “Creating space in the bases of color to actually grapple with the victimhood that we absolutely have every right to feel, but to not leave room to use it as an excuse – that was also a really powerful thing.”

Leadership development of white members has challenged cultures of performative allyship and charity, and agitated them towards clarity about their own stake and self-interest in multiracial democracy. In ISAIAH's experience, organizers and leaders building a sense of their self-interest (both as individuals and as a racial group) need not diminish or oppose their sense of solidarity across racial difference. As ISAIAH's Executive Director Doran Schrantz shared, "We all share a political destiny, though how we experience it is different." The common space of the house harmonizes these separate rooms and their strategies into a "symphony" to collectivize different constituencies' people power and move it strategically on the "chess board" of statewide politics.

Lastly, the fractal and the stool are structure shapes that allow spaces for separate racialized communities to share space within affiliate organizations, and for cross-racial collaboration at a movement ecosystem level. The fractal of Florida's StateWide Alignment Group brings together six statewide organizations, each with its own multiracial membership. But one or two organizations in the alignment take the lead on addressing a specific constituency as part of the alignment's overall campaigns. In the 2020 election cycle, for example, SEIU and New Florida Majority (now Florida Rising) led on work with Black communities, Florida Immigrant Coalition and New Florida Majority worked with Latinx communities, and Dream Defenders focused on youth. This division of labor removes the burden on affiliate organizations to be all things to all racialized constituencies, allowing them to focus on the constituencies most relevant to their mission and to collectivize cross-racial power at a higher structural level.

"We all share a political destiny, though how we experience it is different."

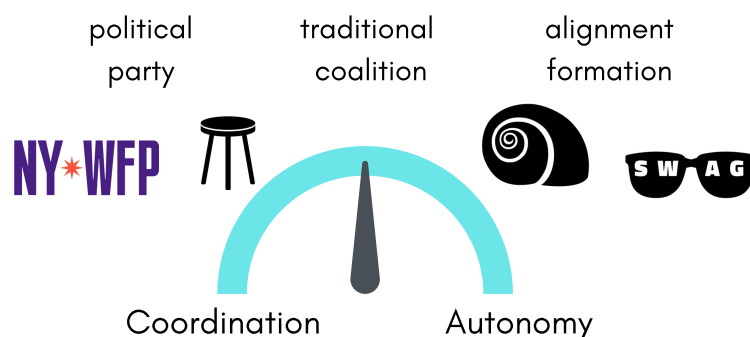
– Doran Schrantz, ISAIAH

POLITICAL POWER

Structures that enable a multiracial constituency to participate in an organization can build the organization's internal power by increasing its ability to undertake collective action. What structures allow organizations to leverage this power externally in the political arena? Han, McKenna, and Oyakawa (2021) liken organizations to prisms, whose design choices are more or less successful at refracting the actions of their constituencies (white light) into external power (vectors of colorful light). These design choices include structure.

While definitions of and orientations to political power are many, ranging from contestation to co-governance, our case studies are particularly instructive about the latter. This section looks at independent political organizations (IPOs) as vehicles for governing power. It does so by taking a deeper dive into the stool and fractal structure shapes as architectures for state-level IPOs, comparing the stories of the New York Working Families Party and Florida's StateWide Alignment Group. By making different choices about the trade-offs between affiliate autonomy and coordination, the two cases offer different pathways to building the 'O' (organization) in IPO.

Trade-offs for Structuring Independent Political Organizations



Structuring Independent Political Organizations

What constitutes an independent political organization? I draw on WFP co-founder Dan Cantor and NY WFP Director Sochie Nnaemeka's definitions to break down the term. According to Cantor (2012), an IPO is *independent* when it is ideologically independent of the Democratic party and willing to challenge its corporate and neoliberal wing electorally and legislatively. This includes recruiting progressives to open seats, primarying corporate Democrats from the Left, and defeating Republicans. An IPO is *political* when it develops its own expertise in electoral work (year-round and not just during election season), as well as a public brand for members to identify with. An IPO is a proper *organization* when it has its own infrastructure rather than one borrowed from other organizations during electoral cycles. Similarly, it should be working with its own and not borrowed resources. One option for resources would be through member dues, as worker's and socialist parties in parliamentary systems have done.

Independent: Ideological, electoral, legislative challenge

Political: Expertise and brand for electoral work

Organization: Own (not borrowed) infrastructure

IPOs are **accountable** to a mass base and wield **power**

-Dan Cantor + Sochie Nnaemeka
New York Working Families Party

To this list, Nnaemeka adds two more defining qualities of an IPO. It must be *accountable* to a mass base, either its own or that of its constituency organizations or both. And it must wield . It must leverage the power of its constituency's votes to win elections and use those wins to advance a governing agenda, not just critique or resist a dominant agenda as a minority party.

What structure shapes can scaffold an independent political organization? Here, I look at two examples from the research: the New York Working Families Party's stool, legally recognized and structured as a party, and Florida's StateWide Alignment Group's fractal, which has built an IPO within a 501(c)(4) structure, supplemented by additional vehicles like a 501(c)(3) and an LLC. These two movement ecosystem formations of the stool and the fractal tell the stories of two different pathways to independent political power, with different calibrations of the trade-off between affiliate coordination and autonomy.

Contrasting NY WFP's Stool and SWAG's Fractal

NY WFP built a stool, a public, independent vehicle to leverage the electoral power of unions, community organizations, and individual members in the state. As a recognized party in New York state, the organization is structured democratically, though it has also developed a complex system of dues and vote share to balance the influence of large affiliates with that of smaller ones, as well as individual members. These design choices as a stool aim to manage the high level of coordination required among affiliates in order to launch a permanent, independent vehicle, which comes at some expense to affiliates' autonomy.

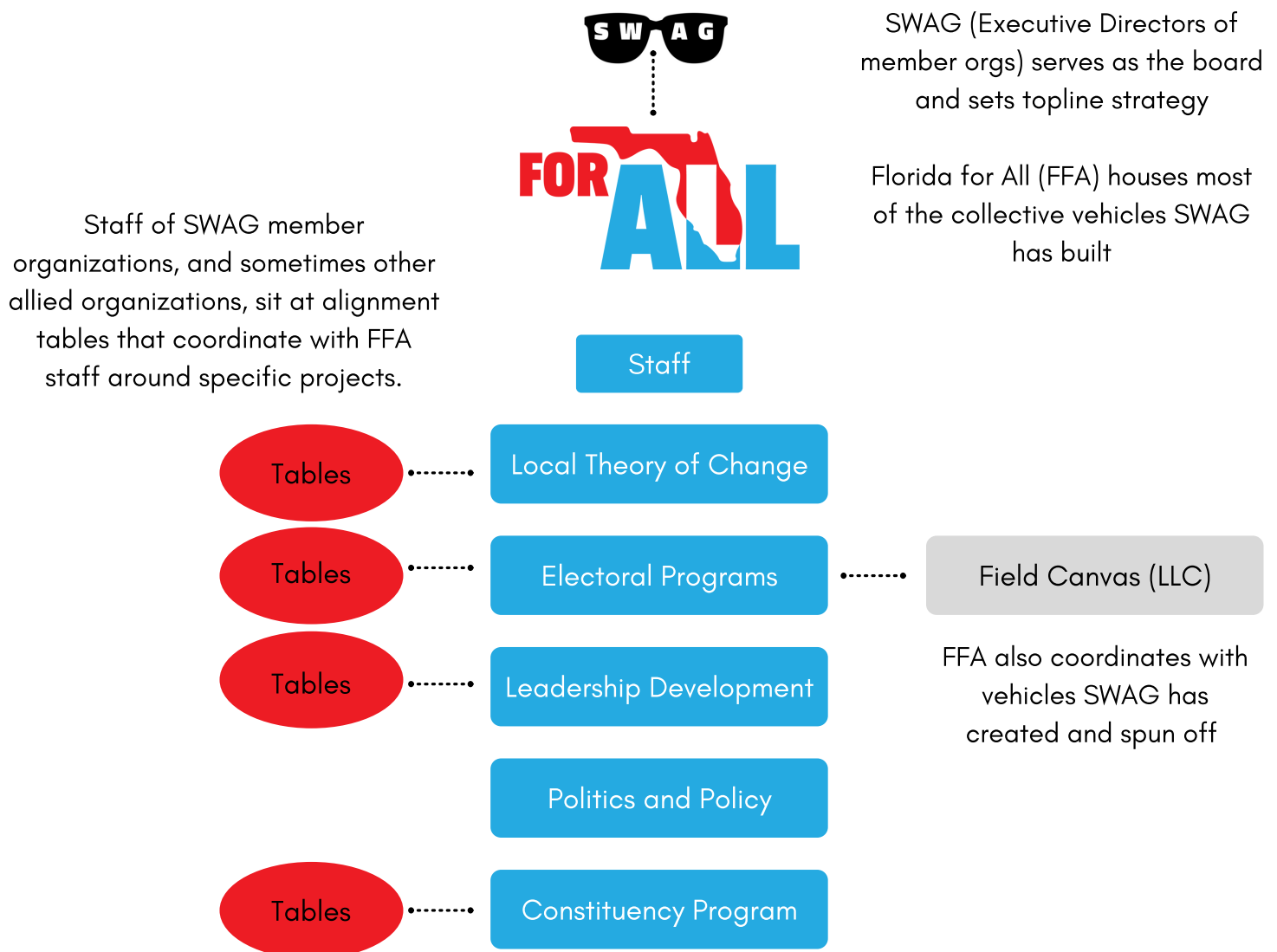
In contrast, SWAG's started as a stealth "convening and coordinating entity for movement organizations" (Corryn Freeman, Florida for All), a fractal that pools the brain power of the directors of six social movement organizations. These leaders develop a shared strategy together and then execute in their own lane. The result maximizes affiliate autonomy, with coordination happening largely top-down and behind the scenes among leaders and staff. In terms of structure innovations, the alignment has only built independent structures as necessary. These include shared lobbying and policy capacity, a political education vehicle for all affiliates' members, and an LLC electoral field operations vendor. While the lack of public branding was meant to keep a target off its back in a trifecta red state, SWAG eventually recognized that not having a public face was squandering the political capital it built each electoral cycle in its independent expenditure campaigns. As a result, the alignment recently launched its own 501(c)(4) organization and public brand, Florida for All (FFA). Importantly, SWAG continues to understand itself as a separate coordinating body not reducible to FFA, a fractal shape which will continue to spin off new structures as needed.

Trade-offs between Affiliate Coordination and Autonomy

What are the benefits and challenges of building a permanent, independent vehicle? For NY WFP, its public brand and democratic process enables members to participate in the governance of the party. While individual membership was somewhat neglected in earlier years, there has been renewed focus on building out an independent base for the party that is not just borrowed from affiliate organizations. The aim is to strengthen the party's organizing (and not just governance) muscles and cultivate a sense of the party as a political home and not just an instrumental vehicle. In contrast, SWAG sees Florida for All as another vehicle for the constituencies of its affiliate organizations, not for building an independent base. SWAG's alignment syncs up strategy and campaigns between its affiliates, but rarely brings their membership together for alignment. As a result, however, members are likely to continue to seek political home in their respective organizations and see FFA as an instrument for leveraging their power. This, coupled with SWAG's stealth, makes it harder to be transparent and accountable to members. Over time, these dynamics may change now that SWAG has launched FFA as a public, semi-autonomous vehicle.

Building a permanent, independent vehicle for political power also creates challenges because it demands stricter unity and subjects organizations to greater public scrutiny. A tale of two governor's races is illustrative. In Florida, SWAG had been running progressive candidates with measured success in many counties when Andrew Gillum's candidacy for governor in 2018 gave the alignment an opportunity at the state level. For political reasons, one of SWAG's labor affiliates could not endorse Gillum. Because SWAG had not built its 501(c)(4) at this point, other organizational affiliates in the alignment could coordinate to knock doors to win Gillum the Democratic nomination. The behind-the-scenes nature of SWAG allowed the union to continue to sit at the table and in the conversation, despite not endorsing.

Structuring SWAG's Fractal of Alignment into an Independent Political Organization



In contrast, public scrutiny and the need for stricter unity pushed a similar conflict over gubernatorial endorsements with labor unions to a breaking point in NY WFP's case. While community organizations were ready to run a progressive challenger against Governor Andrew Cuomo, labor unions were unable to endorse and eventually left the party due to the conflict. This friction was escalated by the state's legal requirement that the NY WFP endorse in every race, including the gubernatorial race. But these challenges are also due in part to the difficulties of managing a high level of affiliate coordination. Whereas SWAG's alignment allowed it to be nimble, permitting its six streams to separate when necessary and reunite again where possible, WFP's structure left it top-heavy and less able to navigate disagreement. However, since NY WFP has restructured with less labor union presence, their agility has grown. As part of the Invest in Our New York coalition, the party won \$4.3B in recurring, progressive revenue for the budget, fully funded public schools, rent relief, and a first-in-the-nation excluded workers' fund.

These two cases are largely similar in their understandings of the 'independent' and 'political' elements of an IPO, but they differ on the 'O': how they've built their organizations. Now that SWAG has solidified into a public entity, will its alignment with affiliate organizations be transformed? Will it calibrate its choices between autonomy and coordination differently? And NY WFP continues to work within the limits of the legal structure imposed upon it to grow more resilient. How will its new restructuring efforts (detailed in the profile on pages 40 - 42) shift the interplay between affiliates? Each of these stories offers an X-ray glimpse at the bones of an independent political organization, raising questions about how structures manage tensions between affiliate autonomy and coordination, public transparency and behind-the-scenes nimbleness, permanent and more temporary vehicles.

CONCLUSION

+ NEXT STEPS

CONCENTRATION OF
P  WER
IS THE PROBLEM
REDISTRIBUTION
OF POWER
IS THE SOLUTION!

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CONCLUSION + NEXT STEPS

This report offers six case studies of structure–strategy pivots in times of organizational upheaval in order to better understand structuring as a relational process over time. From each case study, I’ve abstracted a ‘structure shape’, discerning its primary features, opportunities, and challenges. These metaphorical shapes – a boat, a big tent, a Rubik’s cube, a house, a stool, and a fractal (or nautilus shell) – are more organic than the cold geometries of an org chart. What gives them life is that they embody core tensions that leaders face when structuring membership (scale and depth), staff (member and staff power), or movement ecologies (affiliate autonomy and coordination). Each shape and case offers a different way of wrestling with, though never resolving, those tensions. At the end of the report, I look across the cases to examine what these structure shapes allow organizations to build in terms of internal power (participation of and accountability to a multiracial membership), as well as external power (in the realm of policy and politics).

Our approach to structure as a relational process shifts the question from ‘What is the ideal structure?’ to ‘What conditions and capacities lead to successful structuring processes?’ I draw on Marshall Ganz’s concept of “strategic capacity” (2010), which describes the conditions that enable leaders to develop successful strategies, to suggest a parallel concept of “structuring capacity.” From the Civil Rights movement to Occupy and beyond, social movement history is littered with stories of organizations who collapsed when they could not pivot their structures (and strategies) to meet the moment. In each of the cases, organizations faced a crisis moment where leaders made the decision to invest in their structuring capacity, devoting time and resources to restructuring their organization.

It is the task of future research to illuminate various key components of structuring capacity. Several questions raised in our collective working group discussions can serve as guideposts for further inquiry, such as:

- How are organizations practicing internal self-governance, accountability to members, and member participation in strategic decision-making?
- What role do culture and values play in structuring processes? What lies at the nexus of culture and structure?
- How do financial resources influence structure choices?
- How are structures racialized, and what structures best enable multiracial organizing?

These questions, together with the report’s conceptual framework, offer a preliminary map for a broader research agenda on structuring capacity.

Our hope in creating a learning space to talk about structure was that it could bolster our movement partners’ own structuring capacity, just as we hope the knowledge shared in this report can expand the structuring capacity of its readers.

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