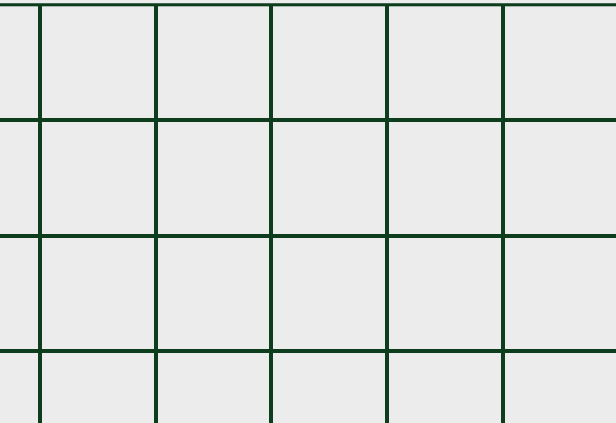


CLIMATE ADVOCACY LAB



Ten-Year Learning & Impact Report



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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
History of the Lab	4
2013 - 2015: From Climate Learning Initiative to Climate Advocacy Lab	4
Fall 2015 - Winter 2016	10
The Lab's roadshow	10
Building a research & experimentation community of practice	13
2017 - 2020: Sustaining Movement Momentum and Building Political Power Through the First Trump	
Administration	16
More public engagement than we ever could have imagined!	16
The critical capacities of powerful social movements	18
The Lab becomes independent	19
A snapshot of the movement in 2019	22
Resourcing climate justice campaign case studies	24
Training the movement to meet the moment	25
March 2020 - Summer 2021	28
Pivoting during the pandemic	28
Deepening our commitment to equity and justice	29
Regrouping after the 2020 election	30
Summer 2021 - Summer 2022	31
Strategic planning and the MRXC climate movement framework	31
Summer 2022 - November 2024	35
Leadership transitions and the shift to a co-director model	35
Strengthening member-to-member connections across a growing community	36
Leveraging IRA implementation to build durable power	38
Training for impact	40
Strategic partnerships & the challenge of breadth vs. depth	42
Expanding our digital and data capacity through a merger with the DCC	44
Blueprint for a multiracial, cross-class climate movement	44
Recommendations for MRXC climate coalitions	45
The Lab's Impact	49
Background	49
Movement Evolution	64
Climate Movement Timeline	71
What's Next	74
Partner Appendix	75
<u>ACE (Action for the Climate Emergency)</u>	75
<u>California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA)</u>	77
<u>League of Conservation Voters (LCV)</u>	80
<u>PennEnvironment</u>	82

Introduction

Given both the present state of the world and U.S. politics, this moment may seem like a strange one for the Climate Advocacy Lab to embark on a project of retrospection. However, as the Lab celebrated its 10th birthday in May 2025 – marking a decade of work equipping the U.S. climate movement with the evidence-based insights, skills, and connections needed to build durable power and win equitable solutions – we are reminded that the organization formed during another period of great uncertainty for the climate community. In the years that followed the failure of Waxman-Markey, organizations across the movement regrouped to chart a path forward, despite the challenging political environment. The Lab was founded as a space to challenge our assumptions, test out new approaches, and share our learnings with others – at a time when it was clear that the existing strategy was not working.

The current political conditions demand our courage, curiosity, creativity, and collective action. They also demand a robust movement support ecosystem, with organizations that are both strong enough to support climate leaders through the steep challenges we face and flexible enough to recognize that the natural and political world around us is changing very quickly.

A commitment to impact evaluation and continuous learning has been a core value from the beginning. Over the years, climate movement and movement support partners have expressed appreciation for our intentional transparency and regular, tight feedback loops. This report aspires to share honestly about what we learned through the process of building, growing, and sustaining the Lab for over a decade as well as evaluate the overall impact of that work on and in the context of the overall climate advocacy community.

This 10-Year Learning & Impact report is divided into four main sections:

- A **history of the Climate Advocacy Lab**, which details our evolution over time, including program offerings and key strategic decision points as well as organizational reflections and learnings along the way
- A summary of the **Lab's impact on the climate advocacy space**, drawing on feedback over the years from hundreds of members and structured around the the assumptions underlying our theory change
- A summary of **climate movement trends** – both those that informed the Labs work and those that were informed by the Lab's work
- An Appendix that includes a database of Lab-funded research projects and **organizational impact stories** from some of the Lab's key research and training partners

History of the Lab

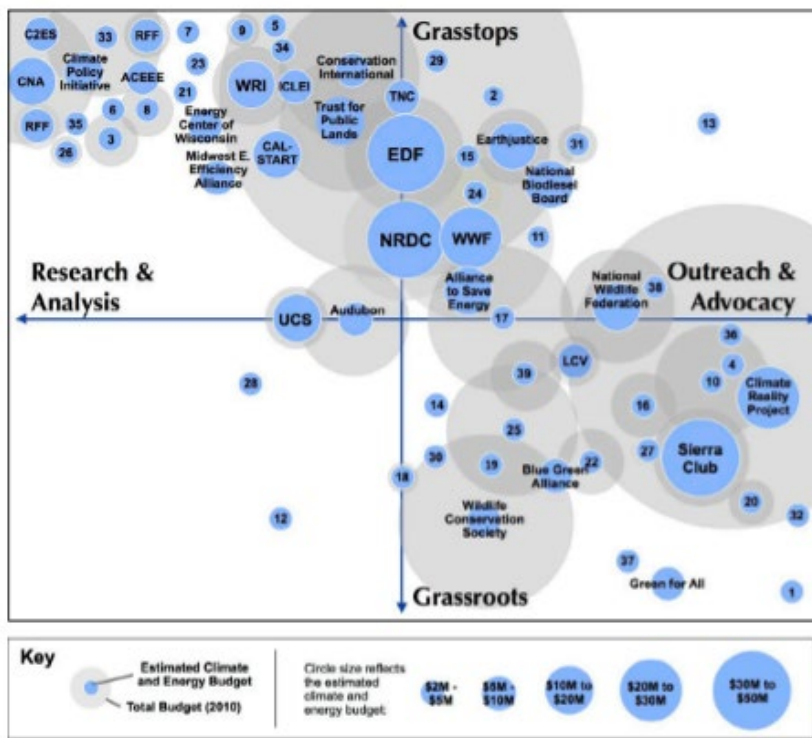
As the Lab team looks ahead to the climate movement's next decade and beyond, we are grateful to be able to build on all the instructive learnings of the past one. Most importantly, we hope these reflections and learnings are valuable to our friends and colleagues across the movement and that they help deepen our collective understanding and strengthen our ongoing climate justice work. In the words of Robin Wall Kimmerer, "All flourishing is mutual."

2013 - 2015: From Climate Learning Initiative to Climate Advocacy Lab

Following the failure to pass comprehensive climate legislation in 2010, many environmental organizations invested in learning and evaluation efforts to understand what went wrong. Political scientist Theda Skocpol published one of the more rigorous [post-mortems, which cautioned](#) overestimating Presidential agency and responsibility for Congressional legislation; mistaking "breadth" of policy support with depth or "intensity" (particularly in key geographies); and relying too heavily on "inside-the-beltway" politics vs. district-level organizing. Skocpol concluded that, "The political tide can be turned over the next decade only by the *creation of a climate-change politics* that includes broad popular mobilization on the center left."

Building off of Skocpol's analysis, the Skoll Global Threats Fund (SGTF) initiated a community landscaping exercise focused on the public engagement required to enable "broad popular mobilization." Leaders from more than 40 climate movement organizations contributed reflections to the analysis. The final report, [Taking Stock: US Climate Engagement](#), delineated some critical gaps in the climate and clean energy movement. Similar to Skocpol's conclusions, many in the climate movement believed that our

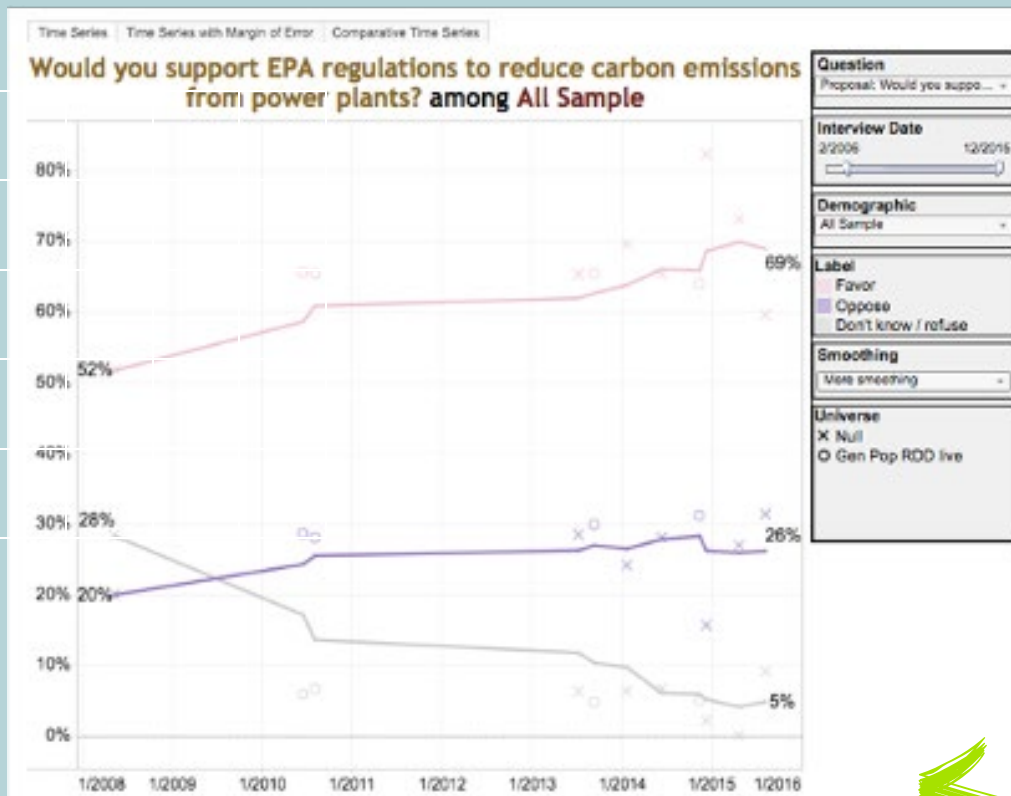
Figure 1. Climate Engagement Landscape



The climate engagement landscape, as outlined in SGTF's 2013 report, [Taking Stock](#).

failure to pass federal climate change legislation was due, in part, to an overemphasis on lobbying and under reliance on building long term grassroots political power¹.

Taking Stock also called out the opportunity to better leverage insights from data analytics and social science in our advocacy work. At the time, there was a surge of interest in data-driven organizing strategies. President Obama’s 2012 re-election campaign had leaned heavily into digital testing, **revealing new insights** about how small tweaks (e.g. email subject line) could result in meaningful differences for key metrics like fundraising and volunteer sign-ups. Similarly, more social scientists were conducting research at the intersection of behavioral economics, political psychology, and climate behaviors. The climate movement was also conducting its own polling, research and large-scale testing on messages and tactics. However, this type of research was often accessible only to the largest/most well-funded groups, and learnings were not shared widely across the community.



The Climate and Clean Energy Polling Consortium aggregated and synthesized public and private polling data across issue areas (such as support for specific policies, like EPA’s Clean Power Plan) and geographies to provide advocates with a better sense of how public opinion was changing over time. The Lab contributed data to the Polling Consortium through our won Tracking Poll. The Lab shared **initial results from the Climate & Clean Energy tracking poll** in May 2015, which was created in response to community calls for better public opinion benchmarking. The Lab fielded the Tracking poll for the last time in 2018, having helped seed community norms around research that led to tremendous growth in available polling data over the past 10 years.

During this period, the movement was growing and changing in noticeable ways. Notably, what had been long-characterized as the “environmental” movement was transforming into the “climate movement” – as the science became increasingly clear that climate change undergirded both traditional environmental causes (such as clean air, clean water, land conservation, and biodiversity) as well as intersected with a host of new and worsening ones (such as extreme weather, infectious diseases, economic justice, and displacement). In particular, the expansive effort to keep fossil fuels “in the ground” encompassed everything from large-scale civil disobedience efforts to stop the Keystone XL pipeline to anti-fracking

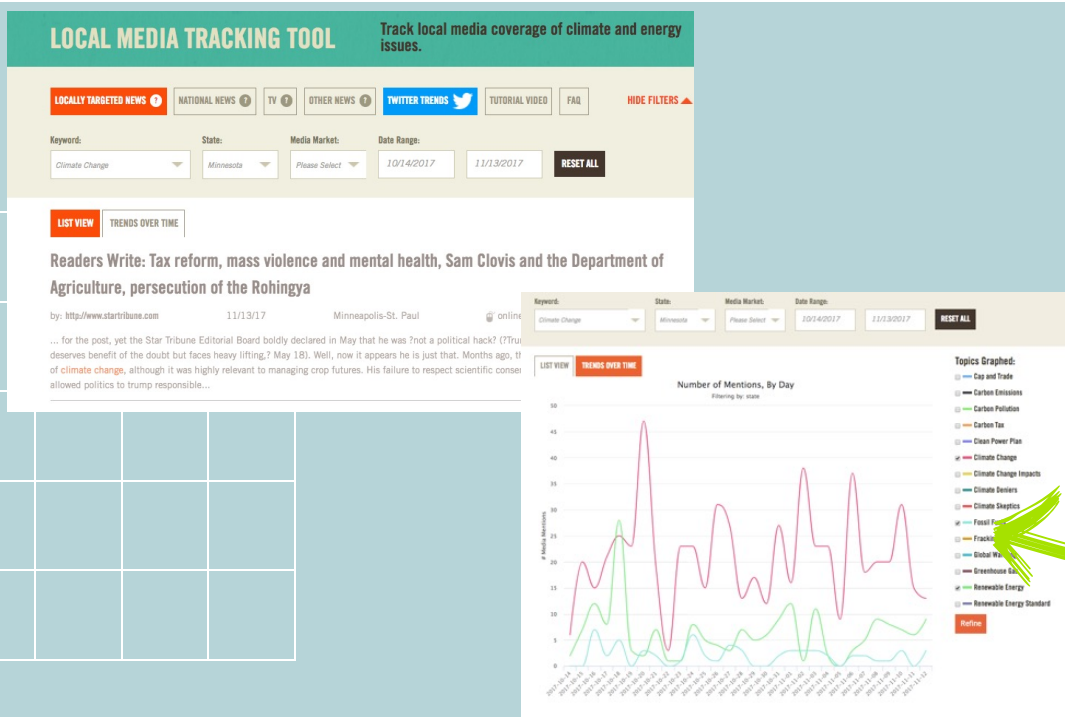
¹ Neither piece adequately acknowledges or addresses how the exclusion of environmental and climate justice organizations in developing and executing on strategy contributed to its failure.

campaigns to a coordinated national effort to retire existing coal plants and prevent new ones from being permitted. The Divestment Movement promoted a complementary strategy to cut off the financing for fossil fuel projects by putting pressure on banks and large institutional investors (universities, foundations, etc.). With few opportunities for progress in a deeply divided Congress, many climate organizations shifted their focus to the local and state level, including around implementation of the Obama Administration’s Clean Power Plan.

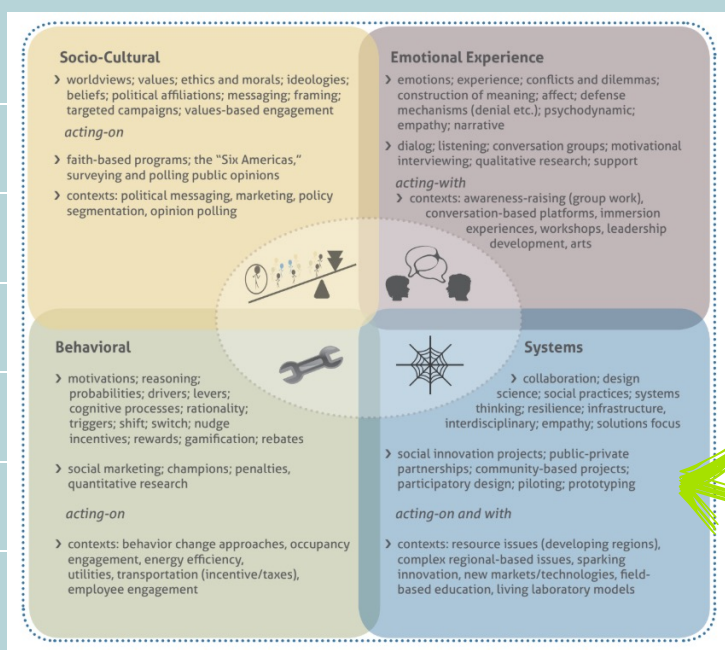
To support the growing momentum around climate advocacy and action, SGTF launched the Climate Learning Initiative (CLI) in 2014 with a goal of funding public engagement-focused research as well as new tools that would help climate advocates access relevant information more easily. SGTF funded more than a dozen field research projects to seed the Initiative with organizations such as the League of Conservation Voters and Union of Concerned Scientists. They also well invested in a number of collaborative community initiatives and tools, including Climate Nexus², the [Yale Climate Opinion Maps](#) (YCOM)³, Climate and Clean Energy Polling Consortium⁴, and the Local Media Tracking Tool⁵.

SGTF also partnered with psychologist Renee Lertzman to lay out a framework for better understanding the current body of research at the intersection of social science and climate. The “Engaging with Climate Change” report laid out four main orientations that form individuals’ engagement on climate: Behavioral, Socio-Cultural, Systems, and Emotional/Experiential.

- ² Climate Nexus provided media, public relations, and communications support for the climate movement. Founded in 2012, the organization sunsetted in the summer of 2024.
- ³ The Yale Climate Opinion Maps (YCOM) downscaled the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication’s national data to provide state-level and county-level public opinion projections, in a mapping format that was easily accessible and understandable for advocates.
- ⁴ The Climate and Clean Energy Polling Consortium transitioned to be the Environmental Polling Consortium in 2021.
- ⁵ The Local Media Tracking Tool sunsetted around the same time as SGTF closed, as the Lab had fewer resources to support community tools.



The Local Media Tracking Tool was a project with [Purpose](#) and [Meltwater](#) with a goal of helping climate advocates better track how local news outlets (including newspapers, TV, and radio) were covering climate and energy issues in their area, as well as how coverage was changing over time.

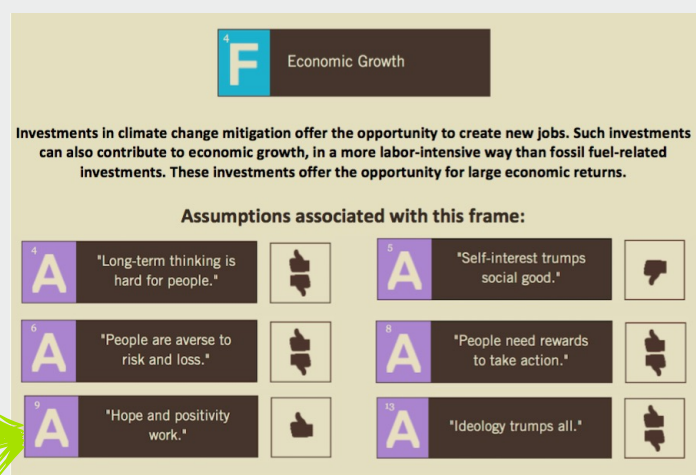


The four main Orientations to Engagement, as outlined in SGTF's 2013 report, [Engaging with Climate Change](#).

Renee, Karen Ehrhardt-Martinez, and Nathan Willcox (a long-time climate advocate and member of the SGTF Climate team) worked together to translate this research into a new tool called the Social Science Field Guide (SSFG). The SSFG identified 17 common assumptions made in climate engagement campaigns, from the idea that "People are uninformed" about climate issues to "Fear is motivating" and gave each assumption a thumbs up, thumbs down, or "mixed thumbs," based on the social science research consensus.

The SSFG also explored how these assumptions show up in commonly-used messaging frames for climate change communication, such as public health and economic growth.

The Social Science Field Guide was an interactive tool that allowed advocates to explore commonly-utilized assumptions and messaging frames in climate communication and provided feedback on the extent to which those approaches were backed by social science. While the Lab "retired" the interactive tool on our website in 2021, you can still access the [full list of assumptions and frames](#).



As the collection of field research, resources, and tools grew, the SGTF team continued to receive feedback from climate leaders that it would be helpful to have a central repository to access them – as well as a space where the community could collaborate to share best practices and explore key public engagement-related questions facing the community on climate and clean energy.

The Climate Advocacy Lab officially launched in May of 2015, to an original community of 100 members – a mix of staff at federal and state-based environmental groups as well as social scientists, data scientists, and funders – with the goal of providing a collaborative space for the sharing of best practices related to engaging the public on climate.

We also started sending a weekly newsletter around this time, which summarized Lab learnings on timely topics and highlighted new research and resources. The Lab's first-ever "weekly update" in mid-June, focused on [Ways to Talk About Pope Francis' Encyclical](#), which shared resources and recommendations related to communicating on climate with faith communities.

For over a decade, the newsletter has remained the primary way in which members engage with the Lab.

We incorporated feedback and continued to make tweaks to the website over the summer, before expanding membership to 250+ additional climate practitioners in late July 2015. Our team was optimistic that once the site had launched, members would start logging in regularly to access the resources, ask questions, and connect with others in the community. We were very wrong! Site usage metrics in the first couple months made it clear that the site wasn't getting a lot of traffic – and our phones weren't ringing off the hook for additional consults with Lab members. While our theory of change was still in development, we know that it would be tough for members to apply new insights in their work if they were not accessing those insights via the Lab.

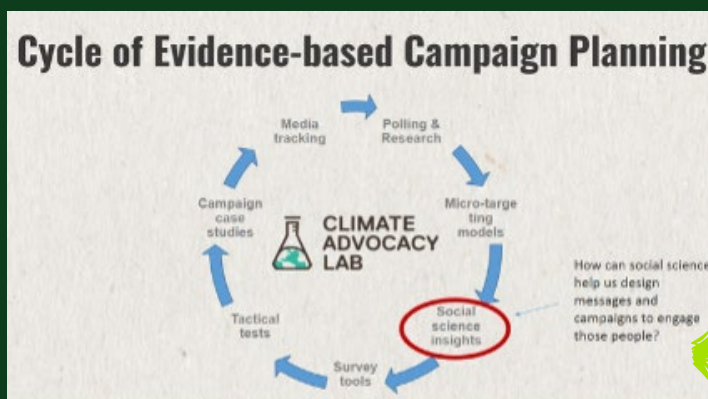


«LEARNINGS FROM THE CLIMATE ADVOCACY LAB'S INITIAL PHASE:»

- **Just because you build it, doesn't mean people will come to use it.** Everyone is busy, and it takes time to both orient to a new tool as well as develop new habits around using it. In the Lab's case, this was true even though we had tried to follow "best practices," with significant user input and multiple rounds of UX (user experience) testing.
- **A gated, "membership" model has benefits and trade-offs.** While the Lab had a public-facing version from the beginning, the majority of our tools and resources were (and continue to be) accessible only after signing in. The primary rationale for requiring a login was to ensure privacy and security, particularly given that organizations were sharing sensitive research and experimentation with the Lab community. Logins also allowed us to more easily track who

was using the platform, and how, which has been critical to understanding usage over time. The biggest trade-off is that logins create a higher barrier to entry for users. If a resource is not easy to access, then people may not come back. People forget passwords or, in some cases, don't even realize they aren't logged in! For the past decade, we have continued to feel like the benefits outweigh these barriers. In this current political moment, privacy and security are more important than ever for our movement.

- **Our “target members” did not end up being our “power users.”** We initially thought that the Lab would be most useful to climate advocates in Campaign, Organizing, Communications, or Data Director roles. Through the roll-out phase, we learned that staff in direct implementation positions were actually more likely to have the time, interest, and direct use case for Lab insights. While we continued to hold a hypothesis that getting Director-level advocates excited about the Lab would be important to shifting movement strategy and culture over the long term, we ended up shifting our strategy for recruitment when we opened up the Lab to additional new members in July of 2015.
- **Developing (and continuing to develop) clear “use cases” for the resource is critical to increasing usage.** Pretty quickly, we recognized the importance of orienting the Lab around climate advocates’ existing “mental models,” and being able to demonstrate how consulting its tools and resources could help answer key questions around strategic decision points in the campaign. For example, we developed a framework called the “cycle of evidence-based campaign planning” that walked members through what Lab tools and resources they might consult at each step of the campaign planning and refinement process.
- **Interactive tools can be valuable – and also expensive to maintain.** The initial iteration of the Lab’s website was very focused on interactive tools (Climate and Clean Energy Polling Consortium, Yale Climate Opinion Maps, Social Science Field Guide, and Local Media Tracking Tool) as well as the Resource Library and State Data Map. Many of these tools were complex, with multiple data streams, externally hosted, and lots of potential for broken links and APIs. We quickly learned that the cost of creating an interactive tool is only a small part of the cost of maintaining it. As a result, we ended up sunsetting a number of the original tools including the Polling Consortium, Local Media Tracking Tool, and Social Science Field Guide. So, if your project strategy relies on interactive tools, make sure to have a plan for sustained funding.
- **Keep checking your assumptions and testing out new approaches.** Like most new initiatives, we learned that we had made a number of incorrect assumptions about how advocates would use and interact with the Lab. Embracing our Bay Area “startup” roots, we leaned into flexibility, iteration, and a willingness to pivot significantly from our original plan during those early months!



An early iteration of the “cycle of evidence-based campaign planning,” which offered suggestions for how advocates could use Lab tools and resources to answer key questions at every step of the campaign planning, implementation, and evaluation process.

Fall 2015 - Winter 2016

The Lab's roadshow

The goal of the Lab was never about traffic or clicks, but about helping climate and clean energy advocates run smarter campaigns: to organize and mobilize more Americans, and win more campaigns. At the time, many climate groups were organizing around implementation of the Obama Administration's Clean Power Plan. Many others were organizing around "keep it the ground" campaigns, fighting everything from fracking leases to pipelines to export terminals. An international cohort of groups were working on campaigns to demonstrate significant public and political will in advance of the December COP (Conference of Parties) in Paris.

So since our members were not coming to the website, we decided to take the website to them! The Lab team "hit the road" in September of 2015. We organized more than a dozen workshops over the next year in cities across the US for nearly 450 climate practitioners.

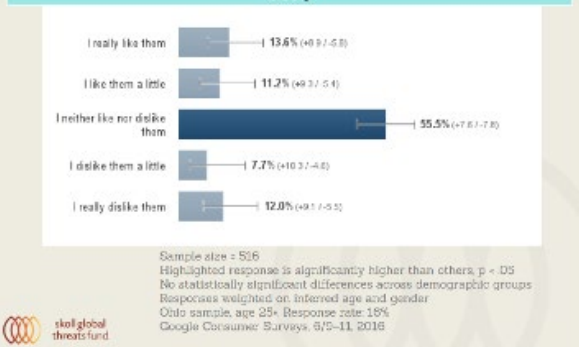
The workshop series had a few goals:

- **Familiarize climate community members with the Lab's resources**, including how to navigate the website. At each workshop, we made sure people had the information they needed to log in, walked through the interactive tools, and showed folks how to search for relevant research in the Resource Library.
- **Train community members on the fundamentals of "evidence-based advocacy"** in a climate campaign context, including using data to inform decision-making, applying insights from social science, and building on learnings from past efforts.

What does evidence-based advocacy look like in practice?



Overall, do you like or dislike your electric utility company? (First Energy, Toledo Edison, Duke, etc.)



(Left) Slides from an [early Lab workshop in Chicago](#) for Midwest climate advocates, focused on socializing the concept of "evidence-based advocacy" and providing examples of what it looks like in practice; (Right) A survey of Ohio residents the Lab conducted in advance of a [workshop in Columbus](#) revealed that a majority of Ohioans feel neutral ("Neither like or dislike") their utility, which challenged many of the participants' assumptions that most people felt frustrated with issues like corruption, pollution, and high electricity bills.

- **Expand the Lab community**, with a focus on connecting with advocates leading campaigns at the local and state level. For the Lab's first year, in-person workshops were the primary way we grew the Lab's membership.
- **Gather information and feedback** from climate advocates across the country to inform the next phase of the Lab's work.

Photos from the Lab's first three in-person workshops. (Left to right) The Lab's original manager, Nathan Willcox, presents in Denver; The Lab's Social Scientist, Justin Role-Redding, reviews message testing findings in Charlottesville; and a colleague presents on Florida-focused field research in Miami.

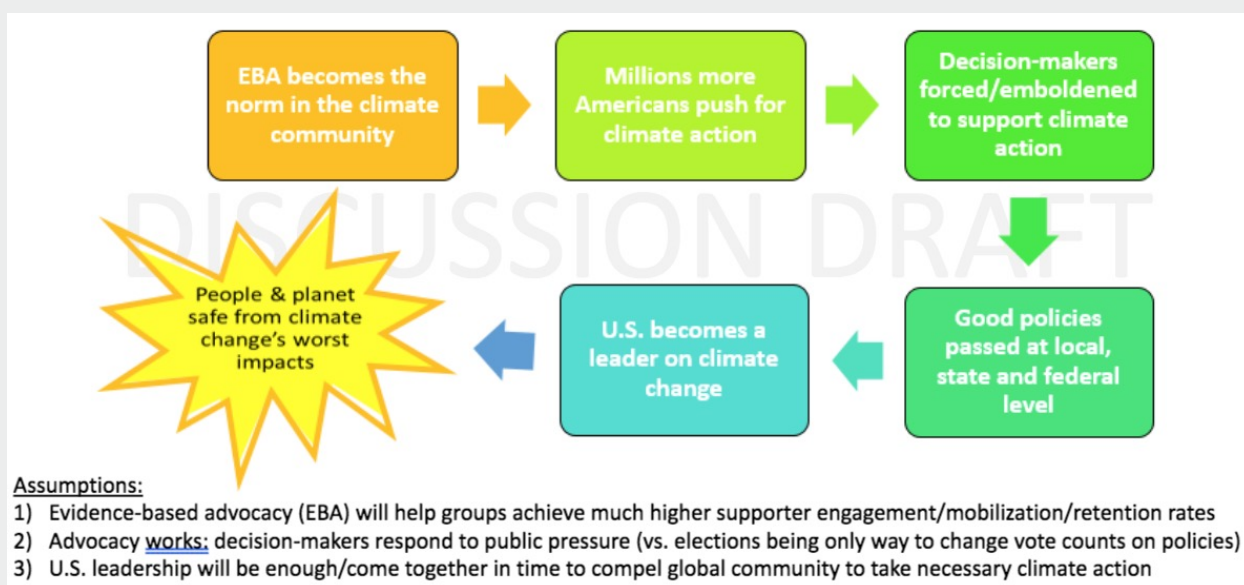


《《LEARNINGS FROM THE ROADSHOW》》

- **There were tons of people working on climate and energy campaigns across the country!** In almost every location, we were limited by room size and not the pool of potential participants. True to our organizing roots, we always encouraged people to “bring a friend” or colleague, which allowed us to reach beyond our existing network. The information we gathered and relationships we built during the initial roadshow tour put us on a trajectory to building the largest, most comprehensive database of organizations and people working on climate, energy, environment, and aligned issues across the U.S.
- **Most of them were unfamiliar with the Lab and what we had to offer.** While not surprising, this fact helped confirm our hypothesis that news of our existence wasn’t spreading quickly by “word of mouth” alone. Giving people time and instructions during the workshop to log in, poke around, and ask questions made a big difference in terms of ongoing engagement with the website.
- **The tenants of “evidence-based advocacy” were also new.** With a few exceptions, most workshop participants had not had exposure to approaches like randomized controlled trials (RCTs), or microtargeting models. The roadshow clarified that the Lab’s success would largely depend on effectively making the case for and socializing “evidence-based” approaches in the community.
- **Localizing each presentation made a difference and deepened our understanding of the ecosystem.** We spent significant time tailoring each presentation for our audience based on feedback we got from pre-workshop 1-on-1 conversations. In addition to finding and sharing local-specific examples, we also integrated examples from participating organizations’ campaigns and websites and ran state-based message tests (via the now defunct Google Survey platform). While intensive, participants appreciated the relevancy of the insights as well as the new research generated to help inform their campaigns.
- **People deeply appreciated the opportunity to be and learn together, in person.** The climate movement was (and still is, in many ways) very fragmented – especially across issue areas and disciplines. We often brought people together who, despite living in the same city, had never met each other. Even before COVID highlighted the value of in-person interaction, we heard over and over how much people appreciated the Lab creating that space through these workshops.
- **We missed an opportunity to evaluate impact early on.** The Lab was still developing our own internal measurement, learning, and evaluation (ML&E) practices during that first year. As a result, we had not yet implemented methods like pre- and post- workshop surveys or started collecting “impact” stories from participants, to help us better understand how they were (or were not) able to apply workshop insights. Over time, our ML&E practices became more robust and standardized across program offerings, but we have much less data from the first couple years.

However the informal feedback we did receive was invaluable – including that many people needed support further “upstream” in their campaign and organizing work. We quickly realized that offering insights targeted at tweaking campaign tactics or messages was not enough. Advocates also needed higher-level support related to strategy and campaign planning.

Much of this feedback fed into the Lab’s first formal “Theory of Change,” which was grounded in the assumption that the widespread adoption of evidence-based approaches would lead to the passage (and implementation) of more climate policies.



A graphic representation of the Lab's Theory of Change in 2016.

Finally, although we did not know it at the time, the roadshow (and subsequent deepening of relationships with state-based organizations and coalition) would prove invaluable in the future, when the results of the 2016 election shifted much of the proactive opportunities to the local and state level.

Building a research & experimentation community of practice

In addition to hosting location-specific workshops for the broader climate community, the Lab also began to build out a more intentional, interdisciplinary “community of practice,” composed of climate advocates, academics, and data scientists focused on research and experimentation.

Modeled off of the Analyst Institute’s regular Analyst Group meetings, the Lab convened its first Research and Experimentation (R+E) workshop in DC in January of 2016. While the focus areas and participants changed over time, the overall vision for R+E was fairly consistent:

- Create a space to share learnings from recent climate engagement-focused research (including polling, message testing, experiments, and case studies)
- Identify gaps in the existing research and generate ideas for projects that might help build the base of evidence around shared, priority areas of inquiry
- Strengthen relationships among climate research practitioners to support ongoing coordination and collaboration

Between 2016 and 2022, the Lab held 11 R+E workshops (8 in-person, 3 virtual) with 500 participants presenting and discussing over dozens research projects.

Data and digital strategist Harold Moore ran a session on “[Measuring to Reflect Our Values](#),” which covered topics from avoiding vanity metrics to “data decolonization.” Misha Clive from Vote Solar presented on their digital organizing work to [Power Up Clean Energy in Michigan](#). The Lab hosted a reception for R+E 7 participants and other DC-based members and partners including Haris Aqueel, Justin Rolfe-Redding, and Lynsy Smithson-Stanley. Ameer Patel presents new research at R+E 8 in DC. Justin Rolfe-Redding, Jack Zhou, and Sarah Vig at the reception following R+E 9 in Oakland; Participants in the Lab’s first virtual R+E convening in May 2020.



《《LEARNINGS FROM THE EARLY R+E CONVENINGS》》

- **People were genuinely excited to share their findings, given a venue!** Prior to the creation of R+E, we heard from many climate advocates that there was a culture of keeping research “close to the vest,” as sharing learnings might diminish any individual organization’s competitive advantage over others. R+E created the space for organizations to share, and we found that most people were excited to do so, when given the opportunity.
- **R+E pushed the needle on key topics, such as deep canvassing.** Social scientists David Broockman and Josh Kalla presented their findings on deep canvassing at one of the first R+E workshops, and quickly inspired others within the community to test out its effectiveness on climate issues. The Lab funded two deep canvassing projects, with Stronger US and Minnesota 350, and the experimental results were shared and discussed at later R+E workshops.
- **R+E helped expand the base of accessible evidence.** Some of the research presented at R+E workshops was funded by the Lab (and therefore would have made its way back to the community, regardless.) However, the R+E venue helped us more effectively leverage the research we were already funding to encourage others to share their research with the border community.
- **The R+E community supported coordination and collaboration among organizations.** For example, through R+E the Lab supported a large, multi-organization research project exploring the “online to offline” ladder of engagement, which analyzed merged member data from seven environmental organizations representing over 12 million records of members, activists, and donors who took nearly 44 million online and offline actions between 2013 and 2018. The project yielded surprising, actionable insights for organizations, including around the challenges of sustaining activist engagement beyond 1 or 2 actions.
- **And also seeded new research partnerships.** Social scientist Adam Levine first connected with a team member from Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL) at a previous R+E workshop. They ended up partnering on a field research project testing the effectiveness of “legitimation rhetoric” as a messaging strategy to encourage CCL members to sign up (and show up) for in-person policymaker education events. Adam presented on the findings from that research project at a subsequent R+E workshop, where staff from PennEnvironment saw the presentation and were excited to test it out in their own advocacy program around an upcoming in-person policymaker education day. PennEnvironment then consulted with Adam to add legitimation rhetoric to their peer-to-peer text program and saw huge increases in sign-ups, vs. the control text message.
- **Impact of R+E was also limited due to the small pot of research dollars and lack of internal infrastructure needed to support experimentation.** Each R+E workshop yielded a long, juicy list of climate engagement questions that practitioners were interested in testing. Although testing can help organizations save money and increase impact in the long term, it also can be resource-intensive. Specifically, many organizations lacked the internal infrastructure (e.g. clean member data, mechanisms to collect action-taking data, etc.) needed to conduct rigorous testing and experimentation. Resource scarcity also made it harder to celebrate “null results,” as the stakes for any one field research project felt high.

- **The research space was far more white and male-dominated than other areas of the movement, presenting a challenge for our commitments to equity.** We noticed early on there were some clear trends in the potential pool of participants for R+E workshops. Social and data scientists as well as the data and research staff at climate organizations tended to skew much more white and male than other parts of the Lab community. While the composition of the R+E shifted a bit over time – tracking with overall shifts in the climate movement – ensuring those convenings reflected the diversity of the broader community was a struggle.
- **Moving R+E online increased reach and diversity of participants.** Along with everything else, R+E became a virtual convening in 2020, due to the COVID pandemic. There were clear benefits to this shift, including around the sheer number of people who could participate – in the past, we had been limited by room size. With that size increase, we were also able to expand the offering to include more panels and presentations, which allowed us to include more case studies as well as qualitative research and reflection projects.
- **Ultimately, R+E was better suited to answer smaller, tactical questions than broader, strategic questions.** Coming out of our strategic planning process in fall of 2022, the Lab made a decision to pivot our research focus toward answering some of the higher-level strategy questions challenging our movement. The Lab held its last official R+E workshop in June of 2022. Elements of R+E have reconstituted in a new community of practice around multiracial, cross-class coalitions as well as data and insights related to IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) implementation.

2017 - 2020: Sustaining Movement Momentum and Building Political Power Through the First Trump Administration

More public engagement than we ever could have imagined!

The 2016 election had a profound shift on the Lab's short-term strategy and long-term trajectory. Like many others in the movement, the Lab had not properly scenario-planned for the Trump Administration. Immediately after taking office, President Trump began to reverse the progress that had been made on climate during President Obama's tenure. He reversed the recent (November 2015) decision denying a permit for the Keystone XL pipeline, gutted the Clean Power Plan, and withdrew the United States from the Paris Climate Accords.

In the immediate term, the Lab synthesized research and insights on mass mobilizations, as people poured into the streets to protest President Trump's policies and practices – including the April 2017 Peoples' Climate March and March for Science. Whereas prior to the 2016 election, Lab members had been concentrating efforts on how to get people to show up (and keep showing up), after the election they were inundated with potential activists eager to be part of new "resistance" efforts.

The Lab doubled down on our investments in increasing the community's capacity for testing and research, as big questions popped up amidst the ever-changing political conditions.

We funded a handful of field experiments to help inform advocates' tactical and communications decisions vis-à-vis the new administration. For example, the Lab partnered with Virginia-based Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions and the Analyst Institute [to test a variety of messages](#) designed to generate petition signatures in support of clean energy. Given the surge in Anti-Trump sentiment in early 2017, they thought Anti-Trump Facebook ads would generate the most clicks-per-impression. However, ads targeting the GOP leaders in the Virginia legislature ended up resulting in both the

Lab team members Carina Barnett-Loro (far left) and Justin Rolfe-Redding (far right) attended the April 2017 March for Science in downtown San Francisco.



The 2017 Research & Experimentation Peer Learning Circle (PLC) included participants from across the Midwest, including Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice, Wisconsin Green Muslims, Illinois Environmental Council, and Iowa Interfaith Power & Light.

highest action rate and lowest cost per completion rate of any of the messages (anti-Trump, anti-GOP, anti-Dominion, negative and non-negative), suggesting that messages focused on local groups and politics may be more effective when the ask is state-specific.

We also launched a [Peer Learning Circle \(PLC\) in partnership with the RE-AMP Network](#) focused on research, testing, and developing an organizational “culture of learning.”

We worked with leaders from seven organizations to develop and test a question related to their work and then [shared the results from those tests](#) at the 2017 RE-AMP Annual Meeting in Chicago.

In addition to that work, our team realized that the political moment also required new insights to guide movement-level strategy. We invested in a parallel field of study and practice focused on social movements and, specifically, understanding the conditions under which social movements built durable power. In partnership with UC-Santa Barbara, we convened a group of movement leaders and academics to develop a [framework for thinking about movement-building research](#), identifying the different levels (Micro, Meso, and Macro) at which advocates can generate tactical and strategic interventions. The Sustaining Movement Momentum and Building Political Power conference focused on four main areas:

- **Persistent participation:** Many people were taking political action for the first time in the early months of the Trump Administration – how do we ensure they keep taking action? For more seasoned activists, what insights from research can help us structure volunteer programs (e.g. distributed organizing models) that support leadership development and sustained engagement with our organizations and campaigns into a long-term base of support?
- **Building effective cross-issue partnerships:** As the climate community becomes more diverse, inclusive, and intersectional, what can we learn about past social movements that might help shape this one?
- **Translating activism to influence:** How can organizations, campaigns, and movements translate that sustained action-taking into political influence and (ideally) durable political power?

While we did not leave the convening with all those questions answered, we did leave with new insights, new connections, and a new focus. Moving forward, the Lab’s work would be oriented not around public engagement, but around *power*.

The critical capacities of powerful social movements

In November of 2017, the Lab partnered with the RE-AMP network to run a workshop in Minneapolis, [Designing Campaigns that Build Political Power](#), which combined a traditional campaign planning structure with movement-building research. At that workshop, we piloted the “critical capacities of social movements” framework for the first time, which was based on the research undergirding

The 2017 Sustaining Movement Momentum and Building Political Power convening was organized in response to the surge in activism and organizing following the 2016 election. An interdisciplinary group of climate leaders, social scientists, and aligned movement practitioners gathered in Santa Barbara to discuss the current moment, identify gaps in our understanding of how activism translates to power, and strengthen relationships.

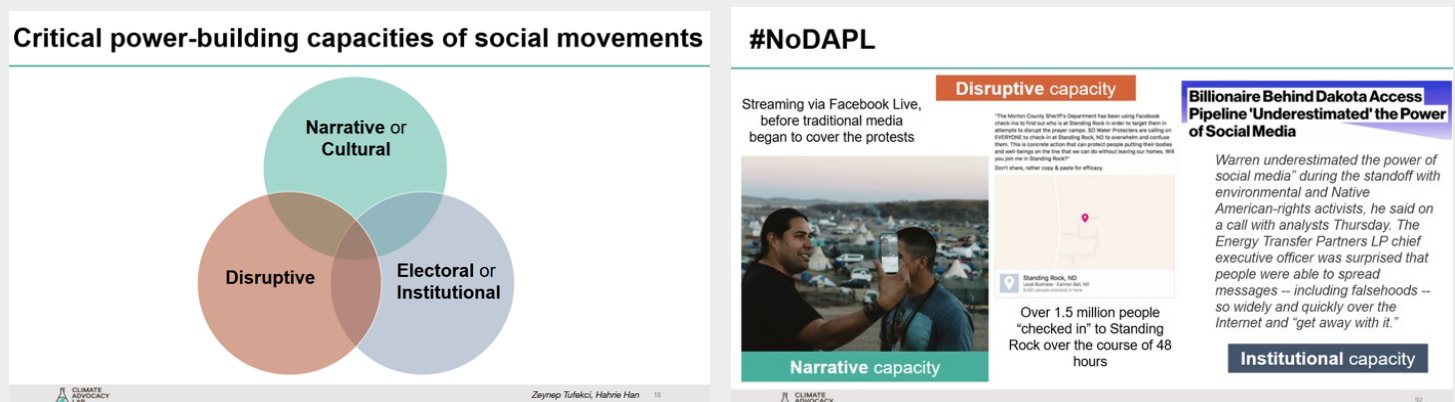


Zeynep Tufekci's book, *Twitter and Teargas*, as well as a handful of other key political science and social movement texts⁶ offering insights around the conditions under which sustained activism generates durable power.

The critical capacities:

- **Narrative:** Ability of the movement to frame the story on its own terms; to spread its worldview
- **Disruptive:** Ability of a movement to interrupt the regular operations of a system of authority
- **Electoral or Institutional:** Ability of a movement to affect a politician's electability or enforce institutional changes

In addition to describing the critical capacities and giving examples of how different climate movement strategies and tactics help to build them, we also developed and shared a framework for assessing progress that included **key metrics to track**. Since that workshop, the “critical capacities” framework has become core to how the Lab orients and organizes insights from across our program work.



The Lab first piloted our “critical capacity framework for powerful social movements” at the 2017 workshop, *Designing Campaigns that Build Political Power*. Among other examples, we highlighted how the Indigenous-led organizing efforts to resist the Dakota Access Pipeline demonstrated how investing in all three critical capacities can translate activism into a powerful movement.

The Lab becomes independent

As part of a larger consolidation of Jeff Skoll’s philanthropic ventures, **SGTF officially sunsetted** at the end of 2017 and the Lab spun off as an independent entity. As of January 2018, we were a fiscally-sponsored program at the Partnership Project, which housed a number of climate and environmental groups including the Climate Action Campaign (CAC).

⁶ In addition to *Twitter and Teargas* by Zeynep Tufekci, the Lab’s original “building power” framework integrated insights from *Rules for Revolutionaries* by Becky Bond and Zack Exley, *This Is An Uprising* by Mark and Paul Engler, *How Organizations Develop Activists* by Hahrie Han, *Analytic Activism* by Dave Karpf, and *No Shortcuts* by Jane McAlevey.

《LEARNINGS FROM OUR SPIN-OFF EFFORTS》

- **Take time to consider what organizational structure makes the most sense.** The Lab considered a number of different options for “where to land” post-SGTF, including embedding within or combining with another organization, seeking our own c3 status, and other fiscal sponsors. Each option presented its own challenges and opportunities, related to timeline, costs, and operational responsibilities. Ultimately, we chose to move to the Partnership Project because we believed it was the most aligned with our desire to become more “community-owned.”
- **Use organizational inflection points as an opportunity to examine culture, processes, and priorities.** Because the Lab was situated within the larger SGTF entity, we naturally adopted its culture, adhered to its organizational policies, and aligned with its strategy. The move out of SGTF and to the Partnership Project presented an opportunity to make a clear decision about what we wanted to keep doing as well as where we wanted to test out new ideas and approaches. Further, while the move meant saying goodbye to a number of beloved team members, it also gave us the opportunity to hire new staff with a longer-term, independent vision in mind.
- **It’s a big adjustment to go from “grant-maker” to “grant-seeker.”** We had been a project of SGTF since inception, and it took a lot of effort to differentiate ourselves and develop a new identity, as a semi-independent entity. In particular, while we had been able to secure funding from two new partners (the Hewlett and McKnight Foundations, in addition to continued support from SGTF’s parent organization, the Skoll Foundation) we knew we would need to raise a significant amount of money and expand our donor collaborative in order to fully resource and sustain the work. This new reality was stressful at times, especially in the beginning. Our greatly reduced budget meant we had fewer resources to fund field experimentation, case studies, and in-persons convenings. The imperative to spend a lot more time and energy fundraising inherently meant less time tracking movement trends, gathering insights, and delivering core programming. On the other hand, the shift created a forcing function which led to important team conversations around validating the “proof of concept” for evidence-based climate advocacy and also ramping up our internal measurement and impact evaluation efforts.

Much of the Lab’s work in 2018 focused on the organizational transition, including on-boarding new team members and migrating all of our systems, policies, and processes over to the Partnership Project. We also took the time as an opportunity to take stock of our larger body of work and reflect on what we had learned from “Lab 1.0.”

A slide from the workshop showcasing the People’s Solutions Lens as a helpful orientation for ensuring those most impacted by climate impacts and proposed solutions are leading campaign planning and implementation efforts.

People’s Solutions Lens

1. **Who makes the decisions?** Those closest to the problems will inevitably know the most about what the solutions need to look like
2. **Who benefits?** The climate crisis is ecological, but it has its roots in systemic inequity that is both racial and economic.
3. **What else will this impact?** Sometimes environmental “solutions” can create new problems for other others that we care about.





The Lab's Community Development Manager, Lucia Olivia Hennely, moderating a panel on "just recovery" efforts in the wake of Hurricanes Harvey and Maria at the 2018 Green Latinos Annual Summit; The Lab team gathered in Durham for the first offsite with our new Executive Director, Sean Kosofsky. We also hosted a gathering to connect with Triangle-area Lab members.



In December, the Lab hosted a 2-day in-person workshop in DC, Evidence for Impact. The workshop laid out a campaign planning framework that combined approaches from a number of our movement support partners⁷ with evidence-based insights gleaned from across the Lab community. 35 participants from climate organizations across the country attended. For the first time, we were able to workshop campaign plans with participants in real-time, over multiple days and through a combination of large and small group discussions paired with 1-on-1 consultations.

We also rolled out a new suite of resources focused on power analysis, strategic communications, building/sustaining powerful activist programs, and integrating commitments to social equity.

In many ways, the Evidence for Impact workshop was the *culmination and synthesis* of all the *research, synthesis, and training* work we had supported in the Lab's first three years – which felt like a fitting end to our first year as an independent organization.

⁷ Including Center for Story-based Strategy, Maine People's Action, Midwest Training Academy, Mobilisation Lab, RE-AMP, Resource Media, Sierra Club, and Spitfire Strategies.



Participants at the Lab's December 2018 "Evidence for Impact" in-person workshop.

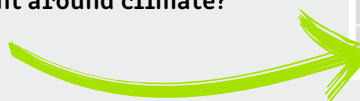
A snapshot of the movement in 2019

In January, the Lab convened 40 climate leaders in DC to explore opportunities and challenges around Public Engagement on Climate. In advance of the workshop, we fielded a 10-question survey of climate leaders (both those who were able to attend the convening and others who weren't) exploring questions regarding their views on the movement's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.

We also asked climate leaders the question, *"What is one 'over the horizon' threat or problematic new development to our public engagement work that keeps you up at night, but which you don't think receives enough attention right now? What steps should be taken to address it?"* Frequently recurring responses included:

- Threats to democracy (including populism)
- Intra-climate movement dynamics
- Opposition from fossil fuel industry, and conservatives
- Skepticism/fake news/disinformation
- Blowing the opportunity of the current moment's momentum
- Economic recession impacting climate concern
- Equity of clean energy transition

Findings from the Lab's report, [A Snapshot of the Movement in 2019](#), which asked climate movement leaders questions such as "What do you see as the most significant success(es) and most significant failure(s) for public engagement and movement building around climate in the last two years?" and "What factors most limit public engagement around climate?"

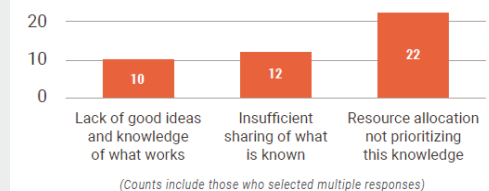


#1 What do you see as the most significant success for public engagement and movement building around climate in the last two years? The most significant failure? Why?

FREQUENTLY RECURRING RESPONSES	
Successes	Failures
Mass mobilizations	Not converting Climate March energy into political pressure
Expansion in the composition/diversity of movement	Climate not priority for voters and in elections
Anti-Trump energy	Carbon taxing/pricing efforts
Green New Deal	Global Climate Action Summit
Local fights and power building	Challenges with Trump administration
Recent elections and resignations	

#5 Is public engagement around climate most limited by a) a lack of good ideas and knowledge of what works, b) insufficient sharing of what is known, or c) resource allocation not prioritizing this knowledge? Why?

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AROUND CLIMATE IS MOST LIMITED BY...



Although no one predicted that a global pandemic would entirely shut down the world a year later – with the benefit of hindsight – we can see that many of these threats have, indeed, presented persistent challenges for the climate community.

We similarly asked leaders, “Based on your familiarity with the Climate Advocacy Lab, what is one thing the Lab isn’t currently doing that you think it should?” Responses included:

- Wider movement representation (especially bringing in more conservatives, and frontline advocates)
- Do more coordination and convening work
- Offer more prescriptive advice and “what works” aggregated learning findings
- Ongoing content on developing movement trends
- Wider dissemination/consumption of Lab content, including beyond Lab members
- Connect more with other movement support providers

Some of the feedback from movement leaders was particularly interesting because it ran counter to assumptions held across the Lab team, such as that we didn’t want to be “too prescriptive” in our recommendations and that people valued that the Lab was a more closed, private community of learning. Other parts of the feedback – such as the importance of the Lab reflecting the full diversity of the climate movement and serving a “network weaving” function – we had heard before from Lab members and partners.

We also developed a complementary report for the convening, [**Five Key Climate Advocacy Lab Insights**](#), which summarized some of the learnings around climate communication and advocacy from our first few years, including:

1. Testing and collaboration can save money and help us win.
2. We have support in more places than we’re currently engaging.
3. We should ask more people to take more actions.
4. Certain actions create more power than others.
5. Relationships matter, and relational organizing is key.

Again, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see that many of these insights and reflections held true over the next 6 years – particularly around the importance of continuing to test, prioritize impactful tactics, and invest in relationships and relational organizing.



The Lab’s Executive Director, Sean Kosofsky, presents findings from our report, *A Snapshot of the Movement in 2019*, to climate movement leaders.

Resourcing climate justice campaign case studies

The Labs also officially launched the [Climate Justice Microgrants program](#) in 2019, following a successful pilot in 2018, with grants to Climate Justice Alliance (to document their “just recovery” work in Puerto Rico, following the devastation of Hurricane Maria), Communities for a Better Environment (to document their ongoing campaign fighting the oil industry in California), Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (to document learnings from a statewide energy efficiency organizing project), and the Portland Clean Energy Fund (to document learnings from their recent ballot initiative victory).

We had long observed a big discrepancy between the powerful campaigns we knew environmental and climate justice organizations were running and the documentation (or lack thereof) of learnings from those campaigns. Our climate justice partners shared that while they had a lot of valuable insights into building grassroots political power to share, they were already strapped for time and funding – and they were definitely not receiving sufficient resources to be able to allocate time to reflect on these learnings and accomplishments.

Further, because climate justice organizations did not have the bandwidth to tell their own stories and/or reflect on impact, their contributions to big wins were too often excluded or undervalued, creating a negative feedback loop that further affected their ability to secure more resources for their work. While we knew the scale of the Lab’s re-granting program would be insufficient to solve the larger issue of disparities in the flow of philanthropic resources, our hope was that climate justice organizations would be able to leverage these projects to demonstrate the impact of their work and secure more resources to support their critical organizing work.

1. TESTING & COLLABORATION CAN SAVE MONEY & HELP US WIN

Our community is very smart in many ways, but we don't always know as much as we think we know regarding what works and what doesn't for engaging Americans on climate and clean energy. When pressed for time and/or working with limited resources, we too often go with our gut or what we've done before, but simple field tests show that our assumptions regarding what will work best are often incorrect.

For example, in the winter of 2017, the Lab helped Virginia-based advocacy groups test their assumption that Pres. Trump would be the best 'villain' to motivate action-taking on state-level energy issues. But the test, involving a series of Facebook ads, found that while the Trump ads got more clicks, there was very little follow-through to action. The ad tied to the State GOP performed the best in the final analysis, generating actions at a cost 1/10th of those ads tied to Pres. Trump. **This testing allowed the coalition to generate more actions for less money than if they had gone with their gut.** It was all part of a campaign that helped convince Gov. Terry McAuliffe to approve new carbon regulations on power plants!

Tests like that show the value of testing our assumptions regarding what people think about climate change, or what will best motivate them to act. But field tests and other research have also led us to conclude that we do know several things related to public engagement best practices.

These include:

- **Consensus and social messaging work.** Telling or showing someone how others agree with a position or are taking action increases the likelihood that that person will take action.
- **Microtargeting models work.** The correct micro-targeting models can help us reach and mobilize the individuals most likely to support our work.
- **Small messaging tweaks have limited impact.** Changing a word or two in any appeal to action is unlikely to result in big changes in persuasion or mobilization rates.

We also see too many examples of groups running great field tests investigating important public engagement questions, and then not sharing the results with other groups (or even broadly within their own organization). There have been occasions when Lab staff have informed members of an organization about research conducted by others at that same organization. This has to change. We'll never achieve dramatic increases in the number of Americans taking action unless we do more to foster a culture of collaboration for sharing field test results and other insights.

Finally, our community can do a better job of consistently applying test results to our work. For example, we know from social science and field tests that the perceived 'distance' of climate change is one of the things preventing more Americans from engaging on the issue. Many people don't see how climate change impacts them and their communities, today. But yet, many groups' webpages are still dominated by images of polar bears and melting glaciers. If those images have been tested as being most effective for engaging those groups' target audiences, then those images make sense. But if not, this is one opportunity to consider alternative images and frames, which research suggests could help attract a broader audience to our issue in a deeper way.

SUGGESTIONS GOING FORWARD

- 1) **Test more.** Testing can help groups be more effective, and doing more of it shouldn't be overwhelming. Testing our assumptions and new approaches can happen at many different levels, from multi-month field tests around volunteers' sustained engagement, to embedding smaller tests in online or phone polling, email blasts, and social media work. Groups should test within the means they can

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The [Five Key Climate Advocacy Lab Insights](#) report summarized learnings around climate communication and advocacy from our first few years.



Jesús Vázquez from Organización Boricua de Agricultura Ecológica presents learnings from the Our Power Puerto Rico campaign, which worked toward a “just recovery” on the island following Hurricane Maria, on a [webinar for the Lab community](#). Our Power Puerto Rico (through its relationship with Climate Justice Alliance) was one of the first recipients of a climate justice microgrant from the Lab.

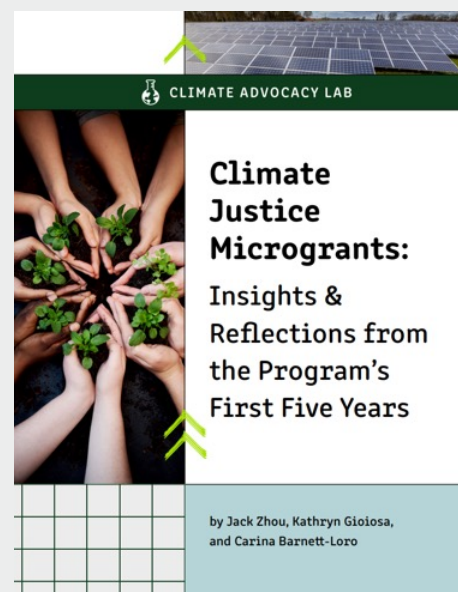
During the summer of 2024, the Lab completed a learning and evaluation document on the first 5 years of the Climate Justice Microgrants program. The report synthesized both learnings shared by funded projects as well as reflections from participants. Insights included:

- Relational organizing and community care are the foundation for all our work.
- Investment in leadership development, skills training, and modeling new systems of democratic governance allowed organizations to build durable people power – even when they lost the campaign.
- Cultural strategies helped organizations both draw on the wisdom of their elders and ancestors, as well as engage new constituencies.

Training the movement to meet the moment

Building off the success and learnings from the December 2018 Evidence for Impact workshop, the Lab pivoted to focus more on designing and delivering in-person workshops and convenings all through 2019.

Although convenings and trainings had been a core piece of the Lab’s programming since the beginning, our training work took on increased importance over the years, as other training and capacity building organizations including the New Organizing Institute, Wellstone Action, the Citizen



The Lab completed its evaluation report on the climate justice microgrant program in 2024, capturing [Insights & Reflections from the Program's First Five Years](#).

Engagement Lab, and Mobilisation Lab⁸ either closed permanently or reformed with a different focus. At the same time, many state-based climate groups were organizing around key legislative policies while both state-based and federal groups were beginning to organize around the 2020 primary and general election. We continued to hear from Lab members and partners that they were eager for more opportunities to expand their campaign organizing skillsets as well as learn and share best practices in community with our climate advocates.

Over the course of the year, we facilitated 10 in-person workshops for climate advocates across the country, with a focus on coalitions organizing around state-level climate and energy policies in Connecticut (Designing Digital Campaigns that Build Power toward Climate Action), Kansas (Evidence for Greater Impact in Kansas), Kentucky (Using Social Science to Supercharge Climate Communication), and North Carolina (Communicating for Climate and Energy Action and Strategic Communications and Media Skills for NC Advocates) as well as for the CEFG (Climate and Energy Funders Group), Southeast Climate and Energy Network, Green Latinos, Vote Solar, and the State Environmental Leaders Conference.

We spent much of December 2019 and January 2020 organizing all of the content that we had developed into evergreen modules that would serve as the basis for a new [“Guides” section of the website.](#)

(Top 3) At the 2019 Climate and Energy Funders Group (CEFG) Annual Meeting in Redondo Beach, CA. Opportunities to present at community convening like CEFG was one metric the Lab used to track our “thought leadership” over time; Lucia Oliva Hennely facilitates a workshop on “Integrating equity” at the Green Latinos Annual Summit in the Adirondacks, NY; The Lab facilitated a two-day campaign planning workshop, Evidence for Greater Impact in Kansas, in Lawrence, KS in partnership with the Kansas Climate + Energy Project; The Lab partnered with the Durham-based One Earth Fund (now [Green South Foundation](#)) on a media and strategic communications training for NC climate advocates.



⁸ The New Organizing Institute (NOI) closed in 2015 and some of its programs were picked up by Wellstone Action – which itself sunsetted and reformed as re:Power in 2018. A number of former NOI staff went on to found the Center for Tech and Civic Life in 2020. The Citizen Engagement Lab (CEL) merged with Culture Strike in 2019 to become the Center for Cultural Power, and shifted its focus exclusively to narrative and cultural organizing work. Around that same time, Mobilisation Lab took a break from offering its campaign accelerator trainings as it transitioned from a fiscally-sponsored entity to an independent collective. In subsequent years, we would see a number of other movement support partners shift focus and/or sunset including Movement Bootcamp, [Rhize](#) (2023), [Powershift Network](#) (2023) and Climate Nexus (2024).

《LEARNINGS FROM OUR IN-PERSON CAMPAIGN PLANNING WORKSHOP》

- **Many advocates had not been through a formal campaign planning or organizing training.** We always asked participants to share copies of their existing campaign plans, in advance of workshops, so we could better tailor content and small-group breakouts. We were surprised by the number of campaigns operating without formal campaign plans, due to a combination of lack of training and of time.
- **Most organizations had not gone through a formal power mapping and analysis project as part of their campaign planning process.** Similarly, many advocates had not had explicit conversations about power within the context of their campaign work and also had not completed a formal power map or community power analysis.
- **In-person workshops were a heavy lift, but appeared to be the most impactful.** Beginning in 2018, we began to use learning and evaluation tools (such as pre- and post-impact surveys and 6-month follow-up calls) more regularly. As a result, we had more data to back up our hypothesis that in-person workshops could (and did) have a long-term impact on advocates' skills and approaches.
- **We didn't have the capacity to offer in-person workshops to everyone, everyone.** The intensity, cost, and carbon emissions of running many more workshops than we were already running felt unsustainable. And yet, there was a tremendous need for ongoing training and capacity-building opportunities to support the growing climate movement. We started making plans to double-down on our in-person workshops in 2020 (spoiler alert: those plans were foiled!) as well as as expand opportunities for self-paced learning around our core content areas (i.e. campaign planning, communications strategy, and building volunteer programs).



The Lab team gathered in San Francisco for a team offsite in the summer of 2019; Lab staff Jack Zhou (far left) and Carina Barnett-Loro (second from right) attended the Global Climate Strike in Durham with other local Lab members.



We tested out the revamped, “best of the best” training modules for the first time during a two-part, three-day campaign & digital organizing workshop that we held in DC in late February 2020. 50 climate advocates attended one or both workshops.

We had no idea that, just a week later, the COVID-19 pandemic would shut down the world and affect climate advocacy efforts for years to come.



The 2020 Evidence for Impact workshop in DC shared evidence-based insights and frameworks across campaign planning, organizing, communications, and digital strategy. Additional video and reflections from the training are available on the Lab's [Training home page](#).

March 2020 - Summer 2021

Pivoting during the pandemic

In some ways, the Lab was well-positioned as an organization to adapt to the new COVID reality because we were already a fully-remote team. Nevertheless, the pandemic entirely upended the Lab's existing strategy. Specifically, we had decided at the end of 2019 to double-down on in-person campaign, organizing, and communications trainings for the Lab community in anticipation of the 2020 election. While there was still a great deal of uncertainty when the world shut down in March 2020 about how long the pandemic would last, we knew we would need to pivot significantly.

Based on conversations with members, the Lab invested in some core research to support advocates' work in the new, COVID reality. We synthesized existing research on [effective climate messaging during COVID](#) and [launched a tracking poll](#) to better understand public opinion and behaviors. We also identified a handful of organizations who were interested in working with us on message testing projects connecting COVID and climate.

The Lab also dramatically expanded our training offerings and quickly moved everything online. Between March 15 and the end of the year, the Lab facilitated 35 virtual trainings serving over 800 climate advocates and organizers.

《LEARNINGS FROM OUR PANDEMIC TRAINING WORK》

- **Uncertainty and upheaval can drive organizing innovation.** As the new reality of the pandemic set in, the Lab started to hear from our members about the new strategies and tactics they were utilizing – from investing more heavily in mutual aid to shifting from their “deep canvass” work to “deep phone calls.” To help capture and share out these learnings, the Lab hosted a Peer Learning Exchange on [Climate campaigning during a global pandemic](#).
- **An ongoing training series paired with 1-on-1 coaching can help advocates quickly “level up” their digital organizing skills.** Through the spring of 2020, the Lab developed and rolled out a new digital organizing curriculum, with trainings such as “[Facebook for organizing](#)” and “[Creating engaging content across digital platforms](#).” We were also able to utilize content from this training series for organizational trainings and a digital organizing-focused peer learning cohort in the Fall of 2020.
- **Reporting on the process can sometimes be as helpful as sharing the results.** By the time the pandemic shut down in-person activities (including going to the office), the Lab had been a mostly-remote team for almost 18 months. As such, we had developed a set of processes and policies to support remote work that we were able to codify and share with others. Similarly, because we were organizing some many virtual trainings and workshops in the spring of 2020, we were able to test out and write up different approaches for engaging and interactive facilitation that we were also able to share out with the community.
- **Virtual trainings create space for community and connection.** Especially in the beginning of the pandemic, people (including Lab members) flocked to Zoom to connect with colleagues across the country and around the world. In addition to trainings, the Lab started hosting additional social and community-building events to help people connect and combat pandemic isolation.
- **Zoom fatigue is real!** By the end of 2020, we noticed people were starting to get “Zoomed out,” with so many aspects of life transitioning to virtual spaces during the pandemic. We noticed that while registrations for virtual trainings remained high, we were also seeing a lower and lower show rate. That observation prompted us to think more intentionally about training recordings as well as continue updating our [Guides section](#) (which we rolled out in early 2020, just prior to the pandemic) to support self-paced learning.

Deepening our commitment to equity and justice

The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd in the spring of 2020 catalyzed action on racial justice and organizational transformations across the climate movement, including at the Lab.

The Lab had been on our own “equity and justice journey” for many years, creating a path that made sense as an organization that had started as an all-white team and a white-dominated philanthropy. For a couple years, we had been setting goals around our individual and organizational commitments to equity using a version of Ken Wilber’s integral theory. In 2019, we formalized and shared our [Commitments to Equity](#) with the Lab community.

In February 2020 we started planning a peer learning cohort for other leaders of traditionally white-led organizations who were looking for support and community as they worked to change culture, policies, and practices at their organizations. We heard from a number of our peer organizations that they, like the Lab, had done work to create those commitments but faced organizational inertia and, at

times, opposition implementing real changes.

While we had opened up applications for the “Operationalizing Equity and Justice Peer Learning Circle (PLC)” in April 2020, the work took on new meaning just a few weeks later, with the death of George Floyd and the summer of uprisings and racial reckoning that followed.

25 people from 19 different organizations participated in the PLC, which met monthly from July 2020 through January 2021.

We summarized lessons learned from the PLC in a [newsletter for the Lab community](#), including:

- Clarify what’s at stake for you, personally, in equity and justice work.
- Be “humble and ready to fumble.”
- No matter your role, you have the power to choose more equitable outcomes.
- Embed “equity primes” in workflows to keep commitments top of mind.

Regrouping after the 2020 election

Outside of the pandemic response, much of the movement’s focus in 2020 was on the November election and working to elect pro-climate leaders at all levels of government, including President. As a strictly c3 organization, the Lab’s election-related work focused on sharing best practices around voter education and turnout efforts, including creating spaces for folks to share their plans for [Adapting Voter Engagement Strategies](#) during a global pandemic.

Following the 2020 election, there was a sign of relief across the movement with a return to pro-climate leadership at the Federal level. A lot of uncertainty remained about how the governing majority would navigate compromise with the more moderate factions of their party, and the prospect of comprehensive climate legislation remained dim. However, all possible scenarios pointed to the importance of trainings oriented toward both campaigns that build power and digital organizing strategies for the “Zoom era” became clear. Following an incredibly intense year of virtual trainings offered for the whole community, we were also interested in testing out a strategy where we prioritized “breadth” vs. “depth” in our training work. Based on our positive experiences running peer learning cohorts (on Research & Experimentation in 2017 and Equity & Justice in 2020), we decided to pilot two new cohorts: Training for Impact (focused on general campaign and organizing strategies) which launched in April 2021 and a Digital Organizing Cohort which launched in October 2021.

Summer 2021 - Summer 2022

Strategic planning and the MRXC climate movement framework

In the summer of 2021, the Lab team embarked on the journey to develop its first-ever 5-year strategic plan. While we had developed annual and even 18-month to 2-year strategic plans in the past, we had never committed to goals, strategy, and programming on a longer time horizon.

By most accounts, the Lab was in a healthy and stable organizational state. We had dramatically expanded our membership during the pandemic, driven primarily by sign-ups for trainings and word-of-mouth referrals by existing members. We also expanded our funder collaborative to include additional foundations, including large multi-year commitments. The Lab's ongoing existence had been somewhat uncertain since leaving Skoll, but in early 2021 we felt increasingly confident that people saw the Lab as a critical, long-term piece of the climate movement ecosystem.

The Lab team gathered in Lake Lure, NC for an in-person strategic planning retreat in late July 2021– our first in-person gathering since COVID.

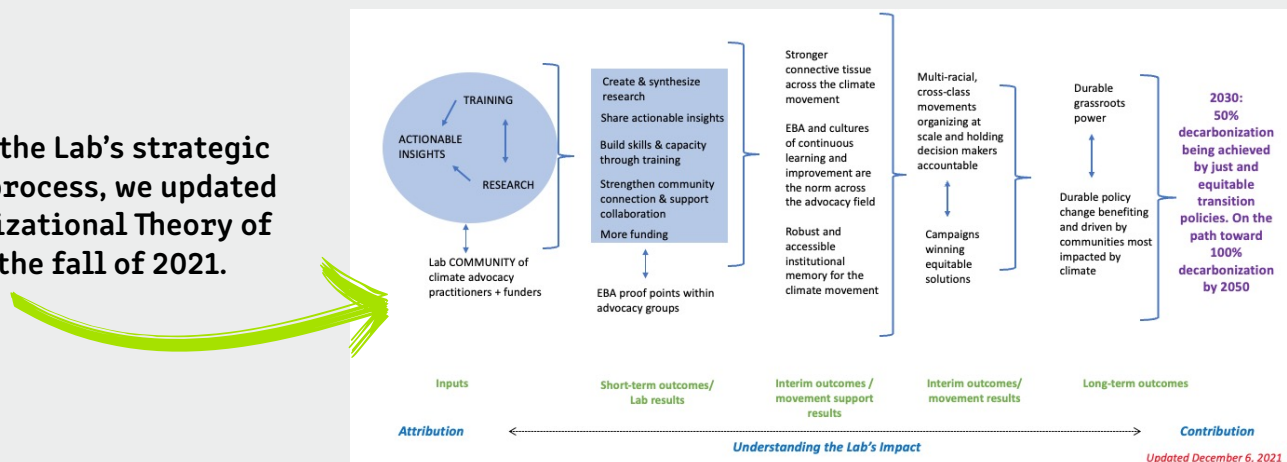


In total, the Lab's strategic planning process lasted almost a year. We worked with Grassroots Solutions for the first 6 months of the process and then continued to build on the framework and insights they laid out. Conversations and discussions related to our mission, values, theory of change, and goals led to a teamwide political education program as well as renewed efforts around measure, learning, and impact evaluation (ML&E).

Our updated mission statement reflected learnings and pivots from our first five years as an organization: We equip the US climate movement with the evidence-based insights, skills, and connections needed to build durable power and win equitable solutions.

Similarly, our theory of change was grounded in the understanding that impact evaluation for movement support organizations exists on an axis of “Attribution to Contribution,” with much of what the Lab could actually control existing further toward the former than the latter. We also took a pass at tethering our work to real goals around equitable decarbonization.

As part of the Lab’s strategic planning process, we updated our organizational Theory of Change in the fall of 2021.



Notably, we also layered in language around our “multiracial, cross-class movements” (MRXC) for the first time – a framework that has been foundational for much of the work we’ve supported since finalizing our strategic plan. In a document prepared in parallel to the updated theory of change, it explains, “From studying past social movements that the durable, transformational change necessary to meaningfully and equitably address the climate crisis is far more likely to occur when multi-racial, cross-class movements claim their collective power, shift our understanding of what’s possible, hold decision makers accountable, and organize people at scale.”

The 2021 book *Prisms of the People*⁹ significantly influenced our thinking around the importance of MRXC movements. MRXC climate coalitions has underpinned all of the most significant local and statewide climate victories since the Lab’s formation, including: [Illinois’ Future Energy Jobs Act](#) (2016); [Portland’s Clean Energy Fund](#) (2018); [New Mexico’s Energy Transition Act](#) (2019); [New York’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act](#) (2019); Virginia’s Clean Energy Economy Act (2020); [Washington’s suite of climate policies](#) (2020), and the Illinois Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (2021).

As explained in the same document:

We believe that if the climate movement builds lasting grassroots power and wins equitable solutions, a just transition toward decarbonization will be possible by 2050. As we prepare this document in 2021, a world that has completely shifted away from burning harmful fossil fuels in just 30 years seems impossible. *However, we recognize that a critical piece of our work as movement actors to help shift collective understanding is what is possible to align with what is necessary*, according to the science – to protect the people and planet we love. This is our moonshot...

⁹ Note relationship to Hahrie and Liz; connection to the work in Santa Barbara

The Climate Advocacy Lab is making such a future possible by helping the climate community take evidence-based action and doing this work with a commitment to equity and justice that addresses environmental racism and historic injustices. We weave together a community of climate advocates, engaging with them to build skills; uncover, share and enact evidence-based practices; and build durable grassroots power and capacity to win. These activities (community cultivation, skills building, research/experimentation, and knowledge transfer) are mutually reinforcing. Together they are intended to result in:

- well-curated, accessible, and actionable resources for evidence-based advocacy (EBA)
- an engaged community of Lab members who are implementing EBA tools and practices, on their own and in collaboration

As a result, Lab members see the benefits of EBA; in particular, they have tangible experiences of changes in practice leading to better results (proof points) in their climate advocacy campaign work. These proof points motivate Lab members to recruit others to join the Lab community; attract funding; and help bring us closer to our vision for an equitable and ecologically regenerative world.

We finalized the [Lab's 5-year \(2022-2027\) strategic plan](#) in the spring of 2022, creating both public-facing and “living” versions of the document.

In tandem with the strategic planning process, we also developed the Lab's first [Learning & Evaluation \(L&E\) plan](#). The goal of the L&E plan was to help the Lab team better understand what assumptions underlying our theory of change and strategy required additional interrogation, as well as what we wanted to prioritize as part of our overall evaluation efforts. This process led to a large-scale shift in how we set and worked toward goals at the organization, with an emphasis on designing programs in a way that would allow us to have clear impact stories from Lab members and partners.

The strategic planning process resulted in a number of significant organizational pivots including:

- **The creation of a strategic partnerships program:** One significant decision made through this process was to identify 5 MRXC climate organizations with whom to build an intentional, long-term partnership. Key aspects of these partnerships include the completion of a “critical capacities” assessment and development of a learning & evaluation plan.

HOW WILL WE MEASURE PROGRESS?			
	What are the direct results of the Lab's work by the end of 2023? See: 2023 OKR tracker	How do we measure the impact of the Lab's work by the end of 2025?	What outcomes are we seeking by the end of 2027?
Partnerships	- 5 MRXC partner organizations have been identified – MOUs have been signed, critical capacities assessments have been completed, and learning & evaluation plans have been drafted. - Partner organizations report positive impact(s) of implementing evidence-based organizing and mobilization strategies in their work.	- 5 MRXC partner organizations have made significant progress and view their long-term partnership with the Lab (including integration of evidence-based practices) as key to supporting that success. - The Lab has established mutual, trusting relationships with these organizations. - Leaders have implemented new processes that support the integration of evidence-based practices across the organization.	- Priority partner organizations have secured and begun implementing equitable climate policies. Their communities are experiencing real benefits. - Organizations continue to view their partnership with the Lab and integration of evidence-based practices as key to supporting that success. - Organizations still check in and consult with the Lab, but are largely independent in their ability to implement evidence-based approaches and, consequently, are able to train and mentor others within their organizations, coalitions, and communities.
Training cohorts	- 50 emerging climate leaders trained via a peer cohort by the Lab report positive impact of implementing evidence-based organizing and mobilization strategies in their work. - 75% come from MRXC climate organizations; 50% identify as BIPOC.	- 200 emerging climate leaders trained via a peer cohort by the Lab report positive impact of implementing evidence-based organizing and mobilization strategies in their work. - Leaders have implemented new processes that support the integration of evidence-based practices across the organization for greater impact. 10% of leaders (15)	- Leaders trained by the Lab over the past 5 years continue to report the positive impact of implementing evidence-based organizing and mobilization strategies in their work. - Leaders have advanced to higher-level positions at climate organizations, and have helped shift orientation of those organizations toward evidence-based, MRXC strategies.

The Lab's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan includes annual benchmarks for measuring progress toward our 2027 goals.

- **Prioritizing “depth” vs. “breadth” in our training work.** Building off work that started in 2021, we also decided to prioritize intensive, regionally or issue-focused peer learning cohorts over one-off trainings
- **Focusing our research on key questions facing MRXC climate organizations.** In particular, we decided during the strategic planning project to embark on a large research project focused on the dynamics of MRXC climate coalitions, and better understanding the conditions that support health coalitions.
- **A commitment to growing the Lab community to reflect an increasingly diverse and distributed climate movement.** We moved forward with a more intentional outreach and recruitment strategy in addition to investing in database hygiene efforts and a new system for collecting demographic (race and class) data.

《《LESSONS FROM OUR STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS》》

- **Long, hard, resource-intensive... and worth it.** We dragged our feet on starting the strategic planning process because we knew it would be time-intensive, a significant amount of work, and potentially uncover some hard truths we weren’t excited to hear. All of those fears came true, and the process was invaluable for the organization. It truly became our “guiding star,” and a document we consulted regularly. We also found the plan to be very helpful in conversations with members, partners, and funders who were more able to easily see how their work might align with ours.
- **Working with an external firm can be helpful.** Working with a consulting firm helped provide external accountability to ensure we stayed on top of our strategic planning workflow, even when we were feeling busy with other programming and commitments. They also helped ensure we got unbiased feedback from key stakeholders (members, partners, funders, Board members) that those people may not have been comfortable sharing with us. They were able to tease out areas of dissension, growth, learning, and impact that we might not have been able to see for ourselves.
- **There are a lot of existing resources and tools available – no need to reinvent the wheel.** We made use of classic strategic planning tools (such as SWOT – Strength, Weakness, Opposition, Threat – analyses and member feedback surveys) and compared notes with peer organizations. While strategic planning can be quite expensive, it doesn’t have to be!
- **Staff transitions can complicate the planning process.** The Lab’s team expanded over the course of our strategic planning process, with two staff transitioning out of the organization and five new team members joining. We hadn’t necessarily anticipated all those transitions when we started the strategic planning process, and struggled with how to fold new team members into key conversations and decision-making processes when they had not been a part of previous conversations and were also newer to the Lab’s work.
- **It’s a living document, so revisit on a regular basis.** We regularly consulted the strategic plan, including taking time each quarter as a team to talk through progress toward our annual and strategic planning goals. On an annual basis, we also made decisions about whether we needed to alter or add to the plan, based on new political and organizational realities

The Lab team gathered for a team offsite in Durham, NC in April 2022 to finalize our strategic plan and develop a two-year work plan; Durham-based Lab members came together for a happy hour to connect with each other and meet staff in person.



Summer 2022 - November 2024

Leadership transitions and the shift to a co-director model

The Lab's first Executive Director, Sean Kosofsky, transitioned out of the organization at the end of 2022. We gathered in San Francisco in November of 2022 for a team offsite to discuss plans for the transition and organizational work planning for the coming year.

Carina Barnett-Loro moved from her role as Deputy Director to Interim Executive Director in January 2023. Over the first 6 months of 2023, the Lab team and Advisory Board explored shifting to a shared leadership model. Apolinar Gonzales joined the Lab team as our second Co-Director in August of 2023.



The Lab team gathered for a team offsite in San Francisco in November 2022 to celebrate Sean's transition and plan work for 2023. We also organized an happy hour for Bay Area Lab members, including long-time member and partner, Crystal Huang, from the Energy Democracy Project.





Apolinar Gonzales joined the Lab team as Co-Director in August 2023; Durham-based Lab members gathered for a Happy Hour to meet and welcome Apolinar to the Lab community.

Strengthening member-to-member connections across a growing community

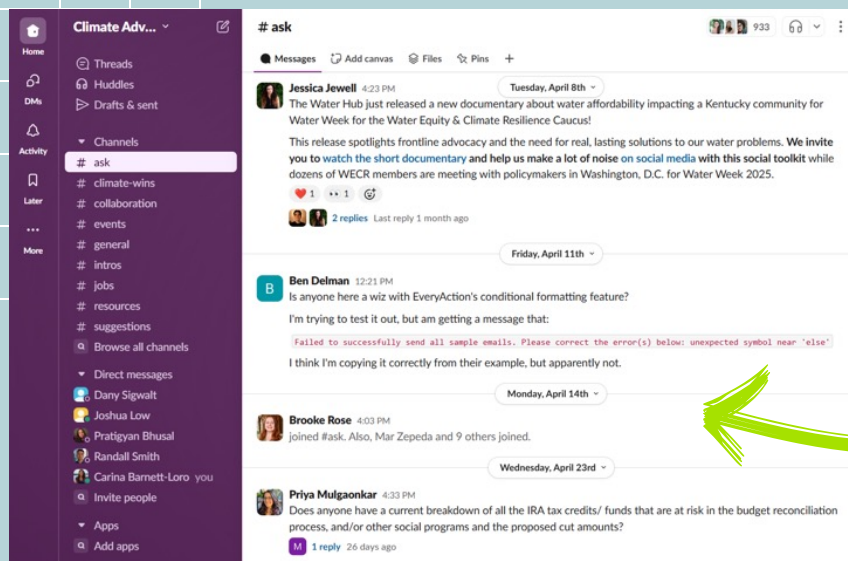
When the Lab first launched, there had been two features designed to support “member to member” interaction: the Community Forum and a messaging function through the Lab’s [Member profile page](#). With the exception of a few active threads, the Community Forum was extremely quiet and we ended up sunsetting the feature at the end of 2016. We learned pretty quickly that people were already engaging in those types of conversations over email, via existing community listservs, and they weren’t really looking for a new platform. Similarly, the member messaging feature was under-utilized from the beginning and, as a result, the Lab team stopped emphasizing it as a part of the new member orientation, which led to even lower awareness and use of the tool.

However the Lab’s membership grew substantially in the first 7 years of its existence – from 150 original members to over 3,000 by the summer of 2022. The Lab’s training program had driven a lot of this growth, as we required (and continue to require) participants in most of our trainings to sign up for membership. Outside of trainings, the vast majority of new members found the Lab through “word of mouth” and were referred by colleagues and co-workers.

Part of the Lab’s mission relied on us being a “connector.” For many years, the Lab community had been small enough that our team members were able to meet much of that demand, making hundreds of email introductions between advocates who were working on similar issues or facing similar challenges as well as between advocates and social scientists who had similar research interests. We were unable to effectively serve that role anymore for a community of thousands, and, at the same time we were hearing for members that they wanted an easy way to directly interact with other members.

Admittedly, the Lab was pretty late to the “Slack game,” especially for being an organization historically on the cutting edge of data and digital tools. We launched a new Slack community in August of 2022 for a small, “pilot” group of active Lab members.

Almost immediately, the Lab Slack experienced a level of activity that our original Community Forum only ever dreamed of. Over the next 2+ years, the Lab’s Slack grew from 50 members to over 900 – representing one-fifth of the Lab’s total membership.



The Lab launched a Slack Community in the fall of 2022. Over the past couple years, the Slack community has grown to over 900 people and is a central way that members interact with other members and experience the broader Lab community.

《LEARNINGS FROM THE LAB'S SLACK COMMUNITY》

- **The “Intros” channel deepened members’ understanding of the Lab community.** In the past, we had received feedback that members didn’t really know who else was also a “member” of the Lab. To help remedy this within the Slack community, we asked everyone to introduce themselves when they joined and share a few key details (such as their location, organization, current campaign focus, and what they were interested in learning or sharing). As a result, members were more easily able to identify and connect with other members who lived in the same place and/or worked on similar issues.
- **It’s an effective forum for members to ask questions and receive helpful feedback and resources.** Given our past experience with a quiet Community Forum, we weren’t sure how willing people would be to either pose questions in the Lab Slack or answer questions posed by others. The Lab staff were careful, especially in the beginning, to model responsive behavior in Slack as well as tag members who might have interesting insights. Over time, members began responding organically more and more frequently, reflecting a high level of ownership and commitment to the community.
- **It’s also great for sharing resources, events, and job postings.** We have always shared resources, events, and job postings in the Lab newsletter, but sometimes missed the opportunity to share things due to timing. The Slack provided a great venue both for crowd-sourcing as well as sharing widely.
- **Slack-supported additional engagement and connection for Peer Learning Cohorts.** The Lab team utilized Slack extensively as part of the Training for Impact (TFI) and Climate + Health (C+H)

Peer Learning Cohorts, creating an additional platform for sharing, celebrating, and seeding peer-to-peer interactions.

- **Expect less traction in seeding smaller sub-channels.** We initially experimented with role-specific (i.e. channels for members in data and partnerships-focused roles) as well as tactic-specific (i.e. members experimenting with deep canvassing) channels, based in part on feedback and requests from members. However, we didn't have as much success in seeding active conversations in those channels and eventually archived them. We didn't get much feedback from members about why they weren't more active in the sub-channels, but our team hypothesized that it may have been too small of a group or that Slack was not quite the right platform.

Leveraging IRA implementation to build durable power

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) was signed into law in August 2022, following a roller coaster 18 months of advocacy, organizing, and policy negotiations that resulted in the first major climate policy ever passed in the US. Reactions across the movement were mixed, ranging from celebration (for the billions of dollars of investment in renewable energy technologies) to mourning (huge handouts to the fossil fuel industry through drilling leases and for investments in “false solutions” like Carbon Capture and Storage).

As a c3 organization primarily working with local and state groups, the Lab had not spent much time or many resources supporting the federal push that resulted in the IRA. In the months that followed, a few things became clear:

- IRA implementation would be a huge focus for organizations across the climate movement, both securing grants for environmental and climate justice communities as well as fighting the worst provisions.
- As a movement, we would also need to contend with the erosion of trust and relationships that occurred through the final negotiations and aftermath.
- The window for implementation would be short, as the pro-climate majority in the Senate and House were likely to disappear with the 2022 midterm elections.
- We would need to push hard for climate organizations to apply a “power-building” lens to IRA implementation and how to ensure the policy was both durable and advanced our movement.
- Coming out of the pandemic, the movement felt more diffuse and fractured than ever – including with the proliferation of new groups formed in the wake of the IRA's passage.

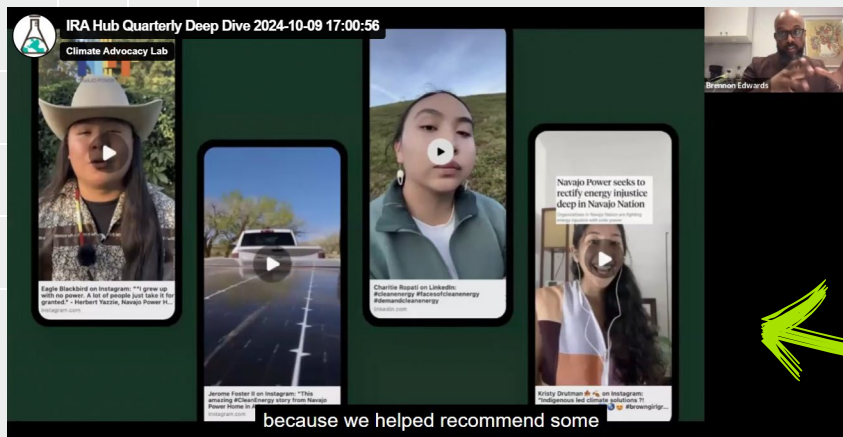
In early 2023, the Lab team began coalescing around a range of potential offerings for the movement, focused on an [analysis of existing offerings and gaps](#) across research, training, and community learning. We developed a strategy framework for [leveraging the IRA to build durable power](#) and hosted a [Peer Learning Exchange on IRA Organizing](#) that created an initial space for sharing lessons learned from the initial implementation phase.

Climate advocates from organizations including Climate Power, North Dakota Native Vote, and Climate Advocates Voces Unidas participated in the Lab's Peer Learning Exchange on IRA Organizing in June of 2023.



In the fall of 2023, we started working on a centralized hub for IRA-related data, research, case studies, and trainings which officially launched as the [IRA Data & Insights Hub](#) in March of 2024¹⁰. In addition to aggregating resources, the Hub also provided ongoing analytics monitoring around IRA-focused digital advertising efforts across the climate community.

Over the next year, the Lab sent out monthly newsletters and hosted quarterly community calls to share research and lessons learned from different IRA-related strategies and tactics.



Brennan Edwards shared insights from the Navajo Power Project's influencer storytelling efforts during [October's IRA Hub peer learning call](#).

¹⁰In January 2025, the IRA Data & Insights Hub was renamed the Clean Energy & IRA Hub.

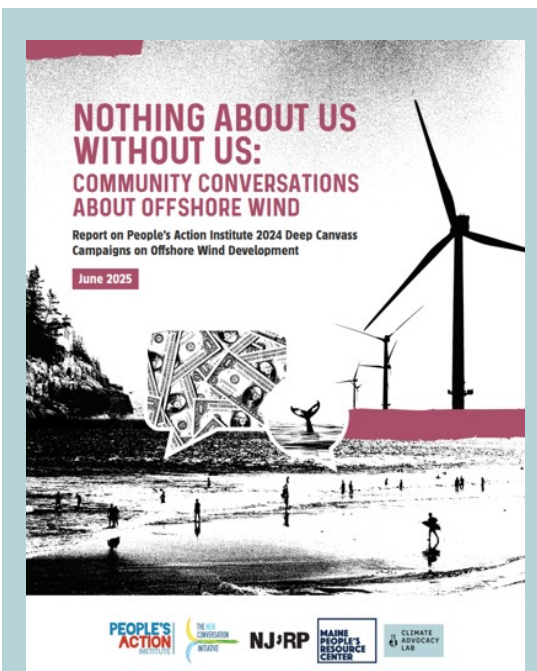
The Lab partnered with People's Action to analyze data from their offshore wind deep canvass programs in Maine and New Jersey, sharing learnings in the report, [Nothing About Us Without Us: Community Conversations About Offshore Wind](#). The Lab also partnered with NY Renewables to [conduct audience research and message testing](#) around clean energy, and with Resource Rural on a series of [framing and message tests](#).

The Trump Administration's actions over their first few months (back) in power has stymied – and in some cases, undone – much of the progress made toward full implementation of the IRA since its passage. As such, the focus of the Lab's IRA work has pivoted from fully-focused on implementation to splitting resources between implementation and defense.

Training for impact

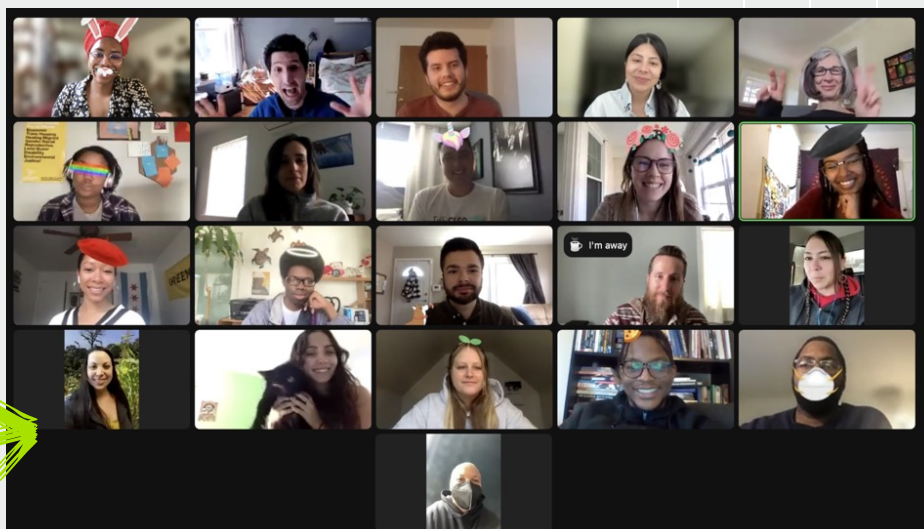
Based on the success of the first two cohorts (as well as our previous Peer Learning Cohorts), the Lab made a decision to focus our training program more fully on TFI.

The world began opening back up again around the same time, which presented the opportunity to move to a “hybrid,” regional approach for TFI, pairing an in-person weekend with ongoing virtual training and coaching opportunities. The third TFI cohort, focused on supporting early-career advocates from Texas and the Southwest, kicked off in Houston in March of 2023. The



The Lab worked with People's Action to analyze data and share learnings from their deep canvass work focused on building support for offshore wind in coastal communities in Maine and New Jersey.

Participants in the second TFI cohort. Based on the success of the first two TFI cohorts, the Lab decided to expand the program and shift to a hybrid approach, with a combination of in-person and virtual training opportunities.





Participants from the Lab's first three regional cohorts, which brought together early-career organizers from Texas, the Southwest, the Midwest, and the Northeast.

Lab's training team completed an evaluation of the TFI program in the fall of 2024, which provides additional background information on the curriculum and structure of TFI as well as on how the program has grown and evolved to meet the needs of early-career environmental and climate justice leaders organizing in multiracial, cross-class, and intergenerational contexts.

Among the insights and reflections summarized in the document:

- **Methodologies and best practices that supported impact** included participatory and experiential learning, opportunities to turn "theory into practice," and peer learning.
- Some of the **most impactful training modules** were those focused on power mapping, strategic planning, ladder of engagement, political education, and conflict management.
- TFI participants named **barriers to success** for early-career organizers such as ageism, tokenization, and lack of core organizing skills.

Training for Impact:
Insights & Reflections from Our First Five Cohorts

by Assata Harris and Gabby Heidrich

The Lab team completed an evaluation of the Training for Impact program in the fall of 2024, summarizing [Insights & Reflections for Our First Five Cohorts](#).

Strategic partnerships & the challenge of breadth vs. depth

The Lab's strategic planning process had highlighted a number of key trade-offs for our organization, including the classic challenge of "breadth vs. depth." We believed that deep, long-term engagement with an organization would be the only way to ensure we had clear, powerful stories of how the Lab's work had impacted organizations and – through the cultural and strategic leadership of those organizations – the larger climate movement.

While the Lab had partnerships with varying levels of formality (including for research and training projects), we had never established a dedicated "Partnerships" program nor had we fleshed out a true strategy to undergird the work. Criteria for selecting partners included:

- Working in a **multiracial, cross-class context**;
- Have an **organizing focus** (or be supporting member organizations that were organizing) so there would be clear avenues and opportunities to apply evidence-based insights for building power;
- **Buy-in for learning & experimentation** at different levels of the organization, so we weren't fighting a ton of organizational inertia;
- **Looking for the kind of support we were well-positioned to offer**, as opposed to either training or technical skills where we didn't have expertise; and
- **Wanted to work with us!** While it may seem obvious, we wanted to work with organizations that "got" the Lab and our approach and wanted to work with us.

We began scoping the program in the fall of 2022, identifying a handful of organizations that met our primary criteria. By the spring of 2023, we had formal partnership agreements with Energy Democracy Project, NY Renews, Popular Democracy¹¹, and USCAN (US Climate Action Network). In 2024, we added two additional state-based organizations as partners: APEN (Asian Pacific Environmental Network) and NC Climate Justice Collective.

¹¹ Formerly, the Center for Popular Democracy

《LEARNINGS FROM OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WORK》

- **The challenges of bandwidth and appropriately pacing a partnership.** We learned quickly that partnership work, over time, would ebb and flow. For example, the partner may have more time to engage in coaching, training, and document review with the Lab during an organization's "frontloading" efforts but much less time during a busy legislative session. Similarly, the Lab team will likely have more insights and feedback to offer during the public engagement parts of the campaign than during policy development. Finding a good balance in the pacing of each partnership could be difficult, and required regular communication, planning, and patience. Similarly, some organizations had more challenges than others in implementing Lab-recommended interventions in their work, often due staff capacity and/or infrastructure limitations, such as their existing CRM.
- **Five partners is actually a big lift – especially when many of those partners are, themselves, networks.** We had gotten feedback on our strategic planning goals early on that, at first glance, five partners did not seem particularly ambitious. However, we quickly found that supporting five partner organizations (given aforementioned challenges around bandwidth and pacing) was actually quite a heavy lift! Moreover, almost all of our partner organizations ended up being "networked" organizations, supporting their own set of affiliates, coalitions, and other formations. We hypothesized that partnering with these types of organizations would help amplify the scale of our partnerships work, but it also created challenges in terms of being able to track impact.
- **What should we track? How should we measure impact?** As a program that flowed directly from our strategic plan, we hoped our work with partners would provide a more focused "laboratory" where we could test evidence-based approaches, iterate over time, and track impact with respect to policy wins (and/or progress toward policy wins). We also aspired to track learning within our partner organizations, as well as the extent to which they increased their capabilities to demonstrate power vis-à-vis the different "critical capacities" that were core to our theory of change. With the benefit of hindsight, we likely tried to be too ambitious in the number of things we were trying to track and measure with our partners. The work would likely have been more flexible (an important characteristic, given the constantly changing political conditions) if we had started with a more simple framework and then increased complexity over time.
- **Even with intentional scoping, not every partnership ended up being a good fit.** The partnerships work was inherently relational – relying on trust and understanding built over months and years. As such, every staff departure (more often on the partner side, but also on the Lab team) resulted in setbacks to the shared work. For example, our initial partnership with USCAN was focused on helping the organization launch a new campaigns program, where USCAN member organizations would work on two priority campaigns together. Unfortunately, shortly after the program launched, USCAN experienced funding challenges resulting in significant organizational transitions, including lay-offs.

Expanding our digital and data capacity through a merger with the DCC

The concept for a Digital Climate Coalition (DCC) originated from conversations following a January 2019 convening in Washington, DC, to discuss findings from a [Climate Communications Field Assessment](#) – an analysis commissioned by the Hewlett Foundation and conducted by the [Camber Collective](#). Throughout the fall of 2019 and spring of 2020, the Lab worked with a coalition of strategic climate communications groups¹² to found a new movement support entity, the Digital Climate Coalition (DCC).

For the next 4 years, the Lab served on the DCC’s steering committee, working closely with DCC to promote improved data infrastructure services, audience insights, digital organizing research, and training to the climate movement. Over that period, the DCC launched a data and analytics hub, provided access to digital tools, conducted research with frontline partners, and regularly convened digital practitioners to discuss opportunities and challenges.

The DCC struggled with many of the challenges that all movement support organizations face, including how to prioritize work – when the needs are infinite – and how to effectively tell the story of their impact. Facing uncertain funding challenges, the DCC decided to sunset in the spring of 2023. That fall, DCC leadership made the decision to merge with the Lab, which felt like a natural landing place given that we shared a fiscal sponsor and had existing infrastructure well-positioned to absorb the DCC’s valuable assets. The DCC completed its own formal [Program Evaluation](#), documenting its history, successes, and learnings from 2020-2023.

The DCC’s Interim Executive Director, Kate McKenney, officially joined the Lab team in January of 2024 as our Digital & Data Director, and now serves as the Lab’s Managing Director.



Blueprint for a multiracial, cross-class climate movement

The seeds of the Lab’s interest in multiracial, cross-class coalitions (MRXC) were first planted back in 2017 through our work planning for and co-organizing the Sustaining Movement Momentum and Building Political Power conference. As part of that effort, we surveyed participants to better understand the key challenges and opportunities in their work. The question of “how do we build effective multiracial, cross-issue partnerships?” emerged as one of the top questions, alongside ones around sustaining activism and developing distributed organizing structures. Our research team conducted a review of existing literature and found relatively little research existed at the time¹³ to help advocates answer that question in their work. One outcome from that conference was a paper that [Hahrie and Lab team member Carina Barnett-Loro co-authored](#) calling for more academic

¹² Including Climate Nexus, Energy Media, Global Strategic Communications Council, Purpose, Resource Media, Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, and the Years Project

¹³ See [page 9 of the meeting pre-read](#) for additional background.

research (both quantitative and qualitative) to answer some of the big questions that emerged from the convening, including the need for more “meso-level” research around coalitions. Hahrie deeply expanded this research with the publication of [Prisms of the People](#) in 2021, which explored coalitions as a critical vehicle for collective action and building durable power. Our team at the Lab loved this research – and it greatly informed our strategic planning process – but we noticed that examination of climate policy-focused coalitions was notably absent. We started dreaming in earnest about what it would take to create that report ourselves. We also began to build more resources on MRXC climate coalitions as well as gather more feedback on what insights would be most useful to the community.

Over the subsequent 6 years since that convening, we saw demand for evidence-based guidance and trainings around healthy coalitions grow. Notably, we provided a microgrant in 2022 for one of our TFI participants, Dejah Powell, to explore [questions she was holding around MRXC organizing at Sunrise Movement](#) that had emerged over the course of the cohort.

In the winter of 2022, the Lab embarked on an ambitious research project focused on understanding what structures, processes, and practices support effective and healthy multiracial, cross-class (MRXC) climate coalitions, with the goal of creating a “blueprint” report detailing key insights as well as a workbook to support advocates in integrating learnings. The research team focused on five recent campaign case studies that felt illustrative of these conditions: the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (IL), Line 3 pipeline fight (MN), Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (NY), the Portland Clean Energy Fund, and WA’s carbon tax ballot initiative.

The final report, [Blueprint for a Multiracial, Cross-Class Climate Movement](#), was published in October of 2023 with an accompanying workbook to support climate leaders in applying the recommendations.

Recommendations for MRXC climate coalitions

- Coordination and communication in coalitions is difficult, especially when participants are coming from disparate political perspectives, personal assumptions, and ways of working. This is why building Trust and Clarity among the collective is important – to provide a buffer of good faith when the going gets tough.
- Coalitions need to develop clear internal processes for decision-making and information-sharing that work for their members. This means clarity



Dejah Powell, the Sunrise Movement’s Membership Director, shared [Reflections, Lessons, & Learnings on Multiracial, Cross-Class Movement Building](#) as part of a Climate Justice Microgrant project. The Lab’s ongoing partnership with Sunrise Movement leaders informed our thinking for the Blueprint report.



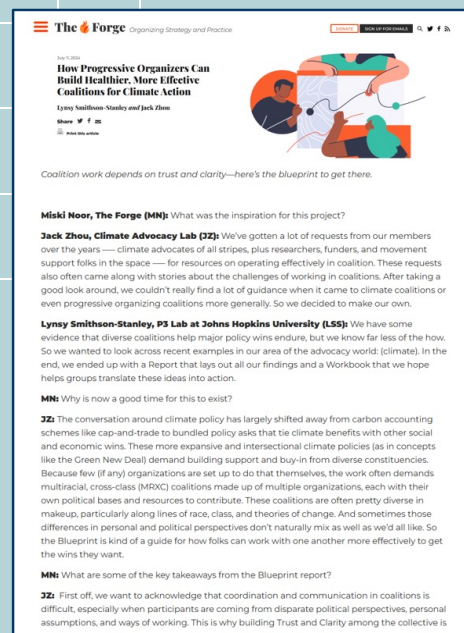
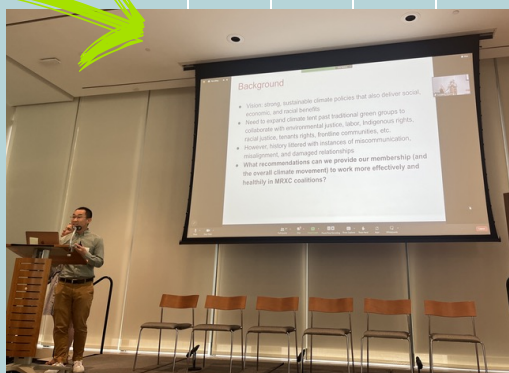
The Lab published its [Blueprint for a Multiracial, Cross-Class Climate Movement](#) in October 2023, the culmination of more than 6 years of community conversations about coalitions.

around major concepts like defining how a coalition's values of equity and inclusion are translated into decision-making, as well as smaller topics like how meetings are scheduled, who's responsible for taking notes, and even where members should go to find the latest updates.

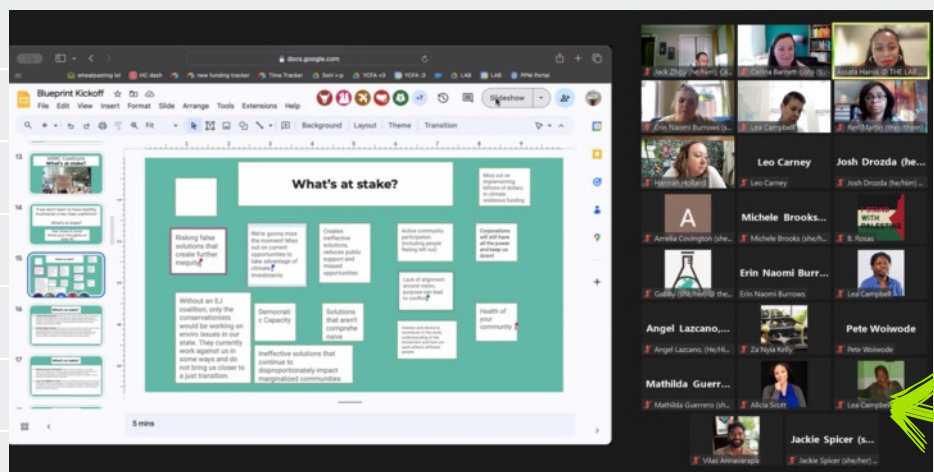
- Conflict within coalitions is inevitable, so coalitions have to pre-emptively figure out ways of managing and working through it. Past disputes or breaches of trust need to be directly acknowledged and addressed in order for the coalition to function at its best – it's wishful thinking to believe that conflict can simply be ignored.

We discussed findings from the report in a [webinar with the full community](#) and also facilitated a smaller [discussion with leaders from strategic partners organizations](#) committed to MRXC coalition work as well as fellow movement support groups. Report co-authors Jack Zhou and Lynsy Smithson-Stanley shared insights and recommendations from the report more broadly at a number of movement convenings (including the 2023 Analyst Group meeting, [the 2024 Mobilization Conference](#), 2024 [NetRoots Nation](#), and the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health's [summer 2024 training series](#)) as well as in movement media outlets ([The Great Battlefield podcast](#) and [The Forge](#)).

Report co-author and Lab social scientist, Jack Zhou, presents initial findings at the July 2023 Analyst Group meeting in DC. Insights from the report were also published in an article for online movement publication, The Forge: [How Progressive Organizers Can Build Healthier, More Effective Coalitions for Climate Action](#)



In June, we organized an in-person [convening in LA for 25 MRXC climate leaders](#) where we explored key questions that had emerged through the coalition's work around topics like democratic governance structures and navigating conflict.



Leaders from 16 different state and regional coalitions participated in the Lab's 4-part training series focused on coalition dynamics and strategies to support a more powerful multi-racial, cross-class climate movement.

《《LEARNINGS FROM THE INITIAL PHASE OF OUR WORK SUPPORTING POWERFUL COALITIONS》》

- **The Blueprint report, workbook, and associated programming expanded movement knowledge** around how diverse climate coalitions should be structured and supported. We heard from many members about how novel and instructive the guidance was – and that nothing else like it really existed.
- **Peer-to-peer sharing reduced stigma around conflict.** We received feedback from the report that normalizing issues of conflict helped individuals adopt a fresh perspective on their work and feel “less alone” in navigating the normal challenges of doing important work in the context of a diverse coalition.
- **Feedback from the training series underscored a clear demand for more comprehensive content and interactive workshops.** Participants in the training series identified persistent challenges in supporting and maintaining MRXC coalitions, and were hungry to explore challenges around institutional inertia, internal governance processes, and navigating conflict more deeply.



Leaders from our strategic partner organizations and other movement support entities gathered in LA in 2024 for a convening on Building Multiracial, Cross-Class Power in the Climate Movement.

Takeaways from the Lab's MRXC climate leader convening:

- In our MRXC spaces, we need to be intentional about creating healthy relational cultures and trying to understand each others' perspectives before diving into the work.
- We should inoculate coalition participants with realistic expectations around conflict so they can develop emotional centeredness and practice addressing and resolving tensions.
- The climate movement at large needs to continue deepening our analysis of class and the political economy to understand MRXC dynamics more holistically.
- We need to be open to iteration and build in tight feedback loops to promote reflection and learning.

The Lab launched a Peer Learning Cohort for climate coalition leaders in January of 2025 – based in part on feedback from participants in the 2024 spring training series who had expressed a desire to go deeper around specific questions.

Background

Research suggests that powerful social movements require strong, shared infrastructure. In addition to the strategy development, advocacy, organizing, and communications skills needed to run campaigns, successful movements must learn to be nimble, iterative, and in a constant practice of experimentation, and learning. Movement support organizations (like the Climate Advocacy Lab) help centralize functions, tactics, knowledge, and resources which, ideally, leads to better information sharing, reduced duplication, and increased efficiencies¹⁴. Relationships are also infrastructure, as Erin Rogers, the Lab's former Program Officer at the Hewlett Foundation, reflected in a blog post about their "Building Political Will for Climate Action" strategy: *"Connective tissue – whether it be skilled coalition managers, or grassroots-to-grassroots connections, or heart-and-mind connections – can help build the political will to solve wicked problems like climate change. Philanthropic funding to support collaboration and partnerships, and strengthen relationships and networks has long been an important underpinning of social change."*

Evaluating the impact as a movement support organization can present real challenges. Measurement, learning, and evaluation (ML&E) practitioners talk about the impact of movement work on higher-level outcomes such as climate policy wins or emissions reductions along a spectrum of "contribution" to "attribution." Capacity-building and field-strengthening work often happens "upstream" from the moments in a campaign where the insights and skills are actually applied. Movement support entities, like the Lab, exist as part of a larger ecosystem of organizations working to plant the seeds for future success. Often, the work is happening behind the scenes and not particularly flashy. As a result, sometimes the true value and impact of movement support works may not be fully recognized until the services are no longer being provided¹⁵. The structural difficulties of demonstrating a movement support organization's impact can lead to their demise, as they struggle to articulate their value and secure sustainable financial resources.

Despite these challenges, the Lab has been (and continues to be) committed to a culture of learning and continuous improvement. Every past and present member of the Lab team has cared deeply about the organization's mission and wanted to ensure we are having the greatest impact possible in service of our vision for healthy, vibrant communities on a climate-stable planet. We often explained to Lab members evidence-based advocacy was needed because "the climate crisis was too important to potentially waste limited resources on strategies and tactics that weren't working" – and we believed the same to be true about our work supporting the climate movement. Similarly, since we were coaching other climate organizations in their own ML&E efforts, we knew it was a priority to feel confident about our own approach to assessing impact and progress toward our goals.

¹⁴ This paragraph reflects notes from conversations that took place at the 2017 convening

¹⁵ As detailed in other sections of this report, nearly a dozen climate (and aligned) movement support organizations have sunsetted or merged in the past decade, while many others have been forced to reduce their size and/or shift their focus.

In the summer of 2021, the Lab worked with one of our former colleagues, Diana Searce, to develop the organization's first formal learning and evaluation plan. Through those efforts, we identified a handful of key evaluation questions that were tied to and informed by the Lab's updated theory of change and new 2022-2027 Strategic plan:

- What are the Lab interventions that have the most impact?
- How are advocacy groups changing how they do their work as a result of their engagement with the Lab?
- What evidence is there that the Lab is driving more and better EBA and that the sector as a whole is improving because of EBA?
- How is the Lab contributing to campaigns winning equitable solutions?
- How is the Lab contributing to multi-racial, cross-class movement building? How is the Lab helping create the infrastructure for greater people power?

As a result of this work, the Lab doubled down on our ML&E work, looping back to these questions on a regular basis as part of our regular organizational planning and evaluation efforts. In crafting this questions, we acknowledged that we had more control over some (e.g. How are advocacy groups changing how they do their work as a result of their engagement with the Lab?) than others (e.g. How is the Lab contributing to campaigns winning equitable solutions?). We worked hard to orient our work in a way that would allow us to answer these questions confidently by the end of our current strategic plan in 2027. As such, we anticipate having more clear data on that time frame to support impact evaluation vis-à-vis some questions, but already have significant data in the spring of 2025 to support evaluation vis-à-vis other questions.

The insights below draw from feedback we have received over the years, including: pre/post-program evaluations, regular member surveys, and notes from nearly 400 1-on-1 conversations with members. In aggregate, these data and stories **tell a powerful story of how the Lab has helped shape and support the climate movement through a period of tremendous growth and change.** They also underscore **how the Lab has impacted approaches to climate advocacy, organizing, and community at the individual, organizational, coalitional, and movement level.**

- The Lab built critical infrastructure, increased collective capacity, and served as institutional memory for the climate movement.
- The Lab strengthened connective tissue across an increasingly large, diverse, and intersectional climate movement – facilitating coordination, collaboration, and peer learning – and normalized a culture of movement generosity.
- The Lab's interdisciplinary Research + Experimentation (R+E) community of practice around research and experimentation has been particularly impactful in seeding new, interdisciplinary collaborations.
- The Lab expanded and democratized access to a base of evidence for what works well (and not so well) in climate advocacy, explored and answered key questions facing climate leaders, and normalized “evidence-based” approaches to climate advocacy and organizing. The Lab also effectively helped advocates make the case for more public engagement and investing in an organizational “culture of learning.”

- The Lab strengthened the leadership capacity and skill sets of thousands of climate advocates in evidence-based approaches to campaign, organizing, and communications through our training program. Through those trainings, the Lab effectively socialized ideas around MRXC movements, strategy, and power-building.

#1. The Lab built critical infrastructure, increased collective capacity, served as institutional memory for the climate movement, and helped leaders make meaning of key moments.

Connected to: How is the Lab helping create the infrastructure for greater people power? What evidence is there that the Lab is driving more and better EBA and that the sector as a whole is improving because of EBA?

The Lab has played a critical role in effectively and efficiently consolidating many valuable services for the climate movement in one place, including tools, resources, and trainings. For nearly a decade, we have been home to the movement's largest collection of climate engagement-focused polling, field experiments, social science research, and case studies, with more than 12,000 resources¹⁶. Every week, hundreds of climate practitioners log in to the Lab to access these resources and work to apply evidence-based insights in the context of their advocacy, organizing, and communications work. We are confident that the Lab has (1) built critical infrastructure and (2) this infrastructure has had a positive effect on the climate movement's overall impact based on a mix of "output" metrics (i.e., resources offered) as well as user-reported "outcome" metrics (i.e., members sharing the Lab's impact with us).

"One of the Lab's greatest contributions has been in its role as a 'sense-maker' and helping climate leaders think through what big moments mean for organizational strategies. The Lab has both supported ongoing learning as well as helped set standards and benchmarks for how the community approaches climate campaign work."—Michael Silberman, Agora Futures

"I feel impressed by – and since joining the Advisory Board really proud of you all have done and contributed to the movement. I can authentically say that you all are adding important, high-value capacity and infrastructure."—Sarah Shanley Hope, Managing Director for Narrative Strategies, The Solutions Project

"Having been involved with the Lab from the incubation to now, I feel like the Lab was ahead of our time, including the commitment to keeping the process and power of building the Lab community in the hands of people with lived experience. I think it is a wild success! And I hope you all know and feel that. It has been a great model, and one that reflects the power of convening, which people often underestimate – as well as the power of convening resources, research, and trainings. There are just so many reasons why it's been beneficial for the climate movement."—Francesca Koe, Landscape & Assessment Lead, Narrative Initiative

"The Lab's name has been coming up more and more in the last few years. I'll hear from colleagues or other funders, 'if you're talking about sharing insights, you should talk to the Lab.' It feels like a default part of the climate community now to connect with the Lab as a resource and thought partner. The Lab shares so many new and innovative approaches and

¹⁶ As of May of 2025

tools for campaigning or communications, and I know many of my colleagues look to the Lab for insights when they are designing campaigns to support organizations on the ground.”

—Refugio Mata, Resource Media

While the Lab did not necessarily aspire to be a “one stop shop” for the climate movement, we have served that function as needed – including when other movement support organizations sunsetted, leaving gaps in the overall ecosystem. Lab staff from over the years reflected on the regular experience of hearing from members about the utility of a training or insight from newsletter – that one of the Lab’s biggest “value-adds” in the climate space was as a clearinghouse for people to share and access information.

“Whenever I wonder if something exists, I go to the Lab’s website and do a search. I always find something relevant to my work. The Lab is a fantastic resource for the movement.”

—Chris Conry, 100% MN

“It’s really useful to learn more about how other groups are approaching similar campaigns, and how they weigh different considerations and approach similar topics. With the Lab, there are so many resources at the literal fingertips of the climate community. If I reach out to a Lab staff member about a resource and they don’t have it, that’s a flag for us at Energy Foundation that it probably doesn’t exist – and likely is a need for the field.”

—Andrew Schenkel, Energy Foundation

“I’ve really appreciated the Climate Advocacy Lab Slack community and the Resource Library the Lab maintains. It’s been a helpful repository of research I’ve consulted for work I’m pursuing on climate and health. Both have been really useful in my initial research on climate and health messaging against fossil fuel. I was able to find a really helpful literature review and also solicit feedback from others in the community on new research topics.”—Paige Knappenberger, Climate Nexus

“The Lab provides access to tools, scientific findings, and examples from other organizations that helps us work in accordance with best practices and avoid redundant work in other states, but there are few effective options for sharing what we’ve learned. The Lab provides a hub to learn about what has and hasn’t worked elsewhere, access to powerful tools and findings that our small organization could not get otherwise, and helps us avoid doing redundant work, saving us time and resources.”—Matt Steffen, Illinois Environmental Council

“This year, the Narrative Initiative has been building a narrative and communications guide for the Green New Deal Network. I frequently log into the Lab to access the communications and public opinion resources in the Resource Library and have incorporated a lot of the insights into our guide – particularly the “summative research” module, where we cover what is already known and what questions still remain. Having access to Lab, and so much relevant research in one place, has both saved us time and resources and improved the end-product.”—Rachel Weidinger, The Narrative Initiative

“Joining the Climate Advocacy Lab has been a great way for me to keep my finger on the pulse of climate research and maintain a grasp on what social science is saying about advocacy work. Whether or not I use specific findings for a specific project, I find myself referencing studies I’ve read or webinars I’ve attended with the lab when considering the most effective or strategic ways to fight the climate crisis. It encourages me to do more testing and research in my organizing work, as well.”—Chelsea Watson, Sierra Club

“I am incredibly grateful for the direction the Lab is heading and the important strategies that are being shared at scale to your network. During our strategic planning process at Peoples Climate Movement (PCM), we spent over 2 years listening to the needs of the climate movement across the US - from the big greens to hyper local, rural organizers to stakeholders that didn’t see themselves as part of the movement but are critical to the future of the movement. All of our learnings pointed directly to the approaches that you all are communicating through your newsletters, trainings, and more: the power of coalition, the need to build critical capacities, resourcing our people, the state of the movement, centering climate justice, training folks, and more. When PCM closed and most of our work merged into the Green New Deal Network, I really worried that there wasn’t a container to keep pushing for this direction in our movement...and I have been so thrilled to see it coming from you! In newsletter after newsletter, and training after training, even in the granting opportunities, the vision/strategy/direction/theory of change you’re communicating is clear and informed and necessary. Thank you – I appreciate all that you do so much.”—Lindsay Crowder, Senior Associate, The Capacity Collaborative

#2. The Lab strengthened connective tissue across an increasingly large, diverse, and intersectional climate movement – facilitating coordination, collaboration, and peer learning – and normalized a culture of movement generosity.

Connected to: How is the Lab contributing to multi-racial, cross-class movement building? How is the Lab helping create the infrastructure for greater people power?

Since 2015, the Lab’s membership has grown from 150 to over 4,500 and is the largest network of US climate advocacy practitioners. Our growth has mirrored the growth of the broader climate movement, which has expanded with the formation of new organizations as well as the addition of more multi-issue advocacy groups addressing climate through the lens of health, housing, and economic justice.

“When you think about the sheer size of the Lab’s membership – 4,300 members, that’s huge! The Lab has played such an important role, both weaving climate organizations and networks together, as well as providing an anchor for advocates in the space. While it can be hard to quantify, there is real value for climate advocates in knowing the Lab is there, that there is a space where they can meet other people and groups working on topics relevant to their work. Not many organizations support groups to come together in that type of interdisciplinary community. The Lab’s offerings feel pretty unique, within the context of a traditional movement support organization, which is often providing a fairly narrow set of things, like tools or resources.”—Bruce Lowry, VP of Investments, Skoll Foundation

“Kentuckians for Energy Democracy were exploring a strategic pivot to target the Public Service Commission. By virtue of being part of the Lab, I was able to connect with a whole bunch of people using this same strategy with whom we weren’t previously connected! And that made us feel a whole lot more validated and confident in investing in a new strategic direction, knowing that other people had come to the same conclusion and had already started testing out and learning from new approaches. I also think it’s really important that we’re learning with and from each other – and not just about what works but also doesn’t work. I find a lot of times people are more hesitant to share the things they tried that don’t work

but I feel like the Lab has a lot of resources that are about learning moments. The Lab is such an amazing resource – especially for those of us working at small, under-funded, under-resourced organizations!”—Cara Cooper, Kentucky Solar Advocacy Network

Over that period, the Lab has leveraged knowledge of and relationships across our network to make thousands of connections across discipline, geography, and issue areas. We have also served as a trusted convener, bringing members together both in-person and virtually. Members often share that Lab convenings created moments of deep connection with folks across the climate advocacy community, leading to both professional partnership opportunities and personal friendships. The importance of this role has only grown since the pandemic, which left many climate advocates feeling isolated.

“The Lab has helped strengthen the environmental community, creating a supportive space for us to better each other’s priorities and strategies as well as build on each other’s ideas and work towards common goals. The Lab really embodies an ethos of ‘movement generosity.’”

—Evan Korshvan, League of Conservation Voters

“I formed new relationships over the course of this workshop with people I, otherwise, would not have met. It feels good to know that we’re not in this alone – that there are people working on similar issues, and experiencing the same struggles but also have successes. That sense of community is so important.”—Acacia Cadogan, NC Environmental Justice Network

“The MRXC climate leaders convening created a space for people with experience in coalitions to share valuable insights and reflections. Coalitions have and will face similar challenges regardless of size or geographic location. There is a wealth of existing knowledge & experience in our movement and coalition spaces. It is important for us to learn from each other, so we do not have to spend time and energy reinventing the wheel or struggling on our own. Our movement is stronger when we are grounded in historical knowledge of our movement and not siloed away from each other. This was an inspiring convening that allowed us to reflect on historical examples of multiracial, cross-class wins and applying lessons learned going forward.”—Jackie Spicer, Nevada Environmental Justice Coalition

“The opportunity to build my network over many years of attending Lab workshops and engage in-person with other people who are doing this work is invaluable – the opportunity to reconnect with fellow energy justice and clean energy and just transition advocates from across the country, working in different spheres, focusing on different aspects of issues that are all part of the same movement. I loved the cross-pollination that Lab workshops help facilitate, and have followed up with so many people I met through those events. The Lab is a place where I’ve been able to benefit from the learning of others and also, where I’ve been able to give back and share learnings from my organization and the work that we have done. The Lab’s commitment to “movement generosity” has influenced the way I show up in spaces, because I want to be part of continuing to build that culture across the climate community. I appreciate everything the Lab has done and the way they build all of us up to be leaders in the movement.”—Misha Clive, Vote solar

Further, the Lab has served as a catalyst for new collaborations, facilitating new partnerships between organizations that likely would not have occurred, in our absence. These collaborations have led to innovative research projects, funders finding new grantees (and vice versa), and long-term partnerships.

“The Lab has been an outstanding connector for us at Neighbours United. Thanks to the R+E online conferences and joint webinars releasing our deep canvassing playbooks and learnings, we formed partnerships with Ohio Citizen Action on their solar siting work that formally began in summer 2023 and is ongoing.. The Lab has also connected us with new funders to resource the deep canvassing work as well as the Potential Energy Coalition. We get tremendous value from the Lab both as a learning and networking space.”—Montana Burgess, Neighbours United

“Watching a webinar organized by the Lab introduced us to an organization that we ended up supporting with a grant.”—Diogo Freire, Green South Foundation

“The Lab has been an indispensable resource for me and my go-to channel for finding help when I need it. I think it fulfills a very important role in movement-building by helping people connect with each other and ask each other for guidance. Through the #asks channel in the Lab Community Slack, I have connected with at least 20 individuals on various topics, receiving amazing advice and fostering collaborations. I’ve even found my current research mentor indirectly through CAL’s networks! With this channel, I have been able to participate in numerous one-on-one calls with people across the country who are eager to help me with my coalition building work and share their own experiences. I think one of the major issues in the climate movement is the presence of silos and lack of collaboration, and the Climate Advocacy Lab does a wonderful job of bridging these gaps.”—Felicia Wang, Sunrise Durham

“In the winter of 2018, the Lab connected us with a larger project to glean insights on environmental activists from multiple organizations through Catalist’s data from voter file and social science modeling data. Through this project, we were able to append additional data to our membership information that helped us demonstrate to a funder that we were succeeding in connecting with conservatives and independents – on a level significant to that funder. Looking for an effective messenger to people on the purple and red parts of the spectrum who are pro clean energy, the funder invested in our work to support a list-building campaign. We are building this campaign now to grow our advocacy list during the second half of 2019, together with another partner which attracts a higher proportion of progressives compared to us. At the end of the campaign, we will run another Catalist match to determine how we each did in bringing in new advocates and the political party breakdown of those advocates, and report back to our funder on both our data and the partner’s insights. We have been able to move this work forward not just because of Climate Lab’s leadership and network, but also because Climate Lab offers us a space to focus on data insights, research, and experimentation.”—Misha Clive, Vote Solar

#3. The Lab’s interdisciplinary Research + Experimentation (R+E) community of practice around research and experimentation has been particularly impactful in seeding new, interdisciplinary collaborations.

Connected to: What are the Lab interventions that have the most impact? How are advocacy groups changing how they do their work as a result of their engagement with the Lab? What evidence is there that the Lab is driving more and better EBA and that the sector as a whole is improving because of EBA?

Between 2016 and 2022, the Lab held 11 R+E workshops with 500 participants presenting and

discussing over 150 different field research projects.

“The Lab’s R+E workshops created an invigorating space to share things that have been tried – whether they worked or not, since we all can’t try everything – and allowed us to build off other people’s learnings. They also helped us talk through shared challenges and brainstorm strategies to overcome them, together. Through R+E, I was able to meet lots of partners and potential partners and build better relationships that otherwise would have just been over the phone or email and not as trusting and open.”—Amit Mistry, League of Conservation Voters

“The Lab’s R+E workshops have been very valuable experiences for me personally and my organization. They provide insight into what questions and research the community has been working on and facilitate connections with other data practitioners which have led to collaborations later on. Climate Action Campaign (CAC) has had the opportunity to present at past workshops, which gave us the opportunity to showcase our work, keep the community informed on our efforts, and gain valuable feedback. The R+E community is an incredible resource for folks planning tests and experiments to make sure they are aware of the community’s existing knowledge, gaps in that knowledge, and whether others are conducting similar research.”—Melissa Woods, Climate Action Campaign CAC)

“YPCCC (Yale Program on Climate Change) has greatly benefited from being part of the Lab community of the years, especially in terms of connecting us with new partners and collaborators. I attended an R+E workshop in Oakland and ended up meeting folks from ACE (Action for the Climate Emergency). We started talking with them about some observations at YPCCC around the ‘spiral of silence’ and how most people have no idea what other people think about climate change, when they try and guess. And that when we correct their misperceptions, that can help motivate actions. They had been running and tracking paid Facebook ads to recruit new teachers into the ACE network, and we ended up working on an experiment together where we tested out ‘social norms,’ language utilizing YCOM data around support for climate education. The tweaks they made to their ad language led to a 45% drop in acquisition costs, per new teacher signing up for their training program. And even more exciting, while some messaging tweaks only result in short-lived bumps, this decrease in acquisition costs lasted for many months.”—Eric Fine, Yale Program on Climate Change (YPCCC)

“One of the Lab’s most valuable contributions to my work has been the community of practitioners and cross-organizational networking opportunities that I’ve found through the R+E community. Following one of the presentations at R+E, we ended up kicking off a working group across organizations around trans/non-binary needs in progressive data space.”

—Josh Uretzsky, Audubon Society

“When I was the Organizing Director at Dayneu, and Dayneu was a brand new organization, we ran our first GOTV campaign. I was in touch with the Lab team and you all expressed interest in the way we were running our phone banks, with a lot of culture and relationship-building, and the success of this new and very niche organization; was turning out sizable numbers of volunteers, what could be learned from that? It felt really valuable to be able to be asked to think about the steps that make the effort successful and how others could take that on, and then have a forum to present. For a new and small organization like us – to have a venue to share our experience and by sharing our experience, we had to be prompted to break down and think about, ‘what did we actually do here?’ I found that really valuable.”—Vicki Kaplan, People’s Action

In particular, the Lab-facilitated partnership between Adam Levine and Citizens Climate Lobby led to **research on “legitimation rhetoric”** that has influenced the communications strategy for hundreds of organizations, large and small. Importantly, the generative spirit of sharing and learning together further reflected and helped normalize the Lab’s vision of “movement generosity.”

“For me, one of the most concrete benefits of being an active member of the Lab has been the many, many, many, many (did I mention many?!) contacts! I connected with Citizens Climate Lobby at the Santa Barbara convening in 2017 and we decided to partner on research together, examining how behavior norms can help motivate and sustain engagement among volunteers. I presented that research – which ended up focusing on strategies organizations can implement to make individuals more comfortable taking new and risky actions that they are nervous about, but that are also really important (like contacting elected representatives to express your concerns about climate!) – at an R+E workshop. These presentations led to many subsequent conversations, and even the opportunity to test these strategies in new contexts. This is interesting to me personally, and it’s also vitally important to the organizations figuring out how to use the knowledge in their local contexts in order to better achieve their theory of change. Huge progress! The climate advocacy space in the US is at the forefront of bridging science and society. This would not be happening without the online and in-person community that the Lab has created and continues to nurture and build. These connections simply don’t happen on their own – they require a space, and also an organization that legitimizes these connections as something that can and should be done more often.”

—Adam Levine, Johns Hopkins

“Working with the Lab has connected me to a whole network of advocates and social scientists across the country, which has provided much-needed motivation and optimism and drive for PennEnvironment to be more collaborative in our work. At past R+E workshops, I have connected with amazing social scientists and advocates, like Lynsy Smithson-Stanley Adam Levine. They were generous in offering consultations on our organizing approach, and I was able to implement findings from their research into my work, as well as collaborate more formally with each of them on a project.”—Florida Cardoni, Penn Environment

“The Research + Experimentation community has been extremely valuable to me and our work at PowerLabs. I saw a presentation by Adam Seth Levine at a workshop about his research into how organizers can provide emotional support to volunteers through the use of legitimation rhetoric and increase the likelihood that the volunteer will participate in an activity that involves social risk. I was really intrigued by the findings and, since that presentation I’ve taught over 500 people about his research and worked directly with Sunrise Movement and a half dozen other organizations to incorporate his findings into their work.”

—Randall Smith, PowerLabs

#4. The Lab expanded and democratized access to a base of evidence for what works well (and not so well) in climate advocacy, explored and answered key questions facing climate leaders, and normalized “evidence-based” approaches to climate advocacy and organizing. The Lab also helped advocates make the case for more public engagement and investing in an organizational “culture of learning.”

Connected to: How are advocacy groups changing how they do their work as a result of their engagement with the Lab? What evidence is there that the Lab is driving more and better EBA and that the sector as a whole is improving because of EBA?

The Lab has directly funded more than 150 field research and case study projects, in addition to collating and synthesizing existing climate engagement social science research. These research projects generated new learnings and filled gaps in movement knowledge. The Lab’s free membership model democratized access to research insights and support - an offering that has been particularly valuable for smaller, community-based organizations with smaller budgets, who did not have the resources to invest in their own research.

“Coming off the failure of cap-and-trade, we realized that, as a community, we were not doing evidence-based advocacy. All the analysis that came out pointed to the fact that we lost because we hadn’t built a broad-based, committed coalition of people. But also that we should be able to build that, because we have folks who care about the issue, we just haven’t engaged them in an authentic way, and met them where they are, all those sorts of things. The Lab took a huge leadership role in the work to push the community in the direction of trying out new approaches, encouraging experimentation, and collecting data. The Lab also helped to build a new knowledge base for the climate movement through the investment in field research and experimentation, in addition to the work synthesizing existing research. And while a lot of the research was context-specific, the Lab was thoughtful about considering what the more broadly-applicable lessons might be, either because of relevant to other fights on an issue or because of the type of community it’s engaging.”—Bruce Lowry, VP of Investments,

Skoll Foundation

“The individual group research projects and case studies, with a whole host of our grantees, have been really important – this is where I’ve seen the Lab contribute to the movement in a very positive way, filling a gap in the field. The Lab has created data infrastructure and generated news audience insights for groups that did have evaluation or research capacity. And the learnings that the Lab has been able to pull from those partnerships for the broader community, like the race/class work – those ideas came from movements and from your team trend-spotting what was actually being used and put into practice across movements.”

—Sarah Shanley-Hope, The Solutions Project

“We have worked closely with the Lab over the last several years – they play such an important role in the over climate movement support ecosystem, providing access to social science research, audience-specific message testing, and aggregated polling data. Together we have co-facilitated trainings for RE-AMP members on evidence-based advocacy, digital organizing, campaign planning, power building, and more. Because of working with the Lab through RE-AMP, our members have tested their assumptions about effective messages and outreach strategies, such as when RE-AMP member, Iowa IPL, learned that the message they assumed would work best with their target audience (one which focused on justice) didn’t

actually test out as well as other messages (like creation care).”—Melissa Gavin, RE-AMP

“The results of the 2016 election left our organization asking an important question about how we communicate with our supporters going forward: should we avoid the crowded and messy national debate and focus on the opportunities at home in Illinois, or couch our state-focused work in that broader context? The Climate Advocacy Lab helped us move beyond our intuitions and guesswork by working with us to develop a test to answer that question. The results of that test continue to guide our messaging today. Working with the Lab to adopt an evidence-based approach has helped us learn more about our audiences and run more efficient campaigns. Whether it is running simple A/B tests of email subject lines to increase open rates, or informing our organization’s brand, implementing an evidence-based approach has made our organization a more effective advocate.”—Matt Steffen, Illinois Environmental Council

“The 2018 polling program helped build CEJA’s constituent contact data infrastructure and increased our capacity for running future, multi-lingual polling and survey programs in partnership with local, community-based organizations. The project gave us an opportunity to have in-depth conversations with communities in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. We learned how residents in communities of color perceive climate issues, what messages are most effective for them, and how we can expand a shared, statewide identity of residents who see climate justice as a critical issue to inform our organizing strategies in the future. Overall, the research project provided valuable insights and learnings to help improve our communications moving forward, be better poised to mobilize our base, and increase engagement over the long-term.”—Mabel Tsang, California Environmental Justice Alliance

“Conservation CO is deeply committed to representing all Coloradans and elevating the voices of people of color through our work. Our work with the Lab has helped us better understand how to diversify our membership and more effectively engage people of color on critical environmental issues in Colorado. Not all strategies and tactics work the same for different audiences so our project with the Lab helped us better understand what works best for the communities we are trying to reach. Our project with the Climate Advocacy Lab allowed us to include many new people in our work and better understand how to engage them moving forward.”—Lilly Zoller, Conservation CO

“In Spring of 2019, the Lab provided KFTC a micro-grant to evaluate the impact of our new Power House Project for rural electric cooperative organizing, which KFTC had begun the year before. The evaluation process, and the support that Lab staff provided to us throughout it, was incredibly valuable for identifying the concrete impacts, successes, and not quite’s of the project. I don’t think we would have been able to devote quite so much rigor or time to evaluating the project without the Lab’s support. The evaluation process ended with a national webinar to other advocates of energy democracy and electric co-op organizing, which the Lab also helped us set up. It was rewarding and humbling to see so many other organizations taking away concrete lessons or plans from the work we could share—and we’re truly grateful to the Lab for facilitating that sharing process.”—Nikita Perumal, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth

“The Climate Advocacy Lab is filling one of the most important unmet needs and neglected issues in the work of environmental and climate justice in the U.S. The majority of competencies and energies expended in social action are doing the work with little resources focused on what is being learned in the process. Even fewer resources are expended on documenting what social action practitioners have learned and on disseminating and deliberating on lessons learned together. Without making our learning a priority, documenting and disseminating it, and deliberating on how we can make our climate justice work both more effective and successful, the way in which we structure and perform our work will neither improve nor achieve our stated goals.”—Mac Legerton, Executive Director, Robeson County Cooperative for Sustainable Development

Insights from Lab research helped inform high-level organizations’ decisions to shift resources to more impactful public engagement strategies and tactics. They also helped partners save money on and increase engagement on specific climate campaigns. Lab-funded field research – in tandem with field research shared by members and partners – helped solidify the community’s understanding of climate advocacy and communication “best practices,” as insights were shared and tested by multiple organizations in diverse contexts.

“ACE worked with the Lab on a research project to see if we could improve the effectiveness of our acquisition efforts via social media. We partnered with ShareProgress to do audience segmentation research for 13-24 year olds and then ran an extensive series of ads testing different climate messages, and images and landing pages. By using the best performing combinations coming out of the tests, we got their cost of name acquisition down to about \$1 per name, which is one-third the industry standard – and probably 1/100 of what it would have cost if we had stuck with our original digital advertising plan.”—Reb Anderson, ACE

“350 Seattle has been using Lab materials on climate communication in training our volunteers on outreach approaches, as we try to become more rigorous in our movement-building efforts. Having the data to back up what are basically ‘relational approaches’ has been helpful, with an activist base that has implicitly relied on trying to inform or catastrophize as ways to motivate others to action. We’ve seen positive results so far from utilizing a more relational approach, and appreciate having access to Lab resources as we continue to iterate on our strategy.”—Meg Wade, 350 Seattle

“APEN’s partnership with the Lab has helped illuminate valuable messages and ways to build authentic connections with our newest base. The Lab helped run various message tests to get valuable information about the audiences we’re hoping to get better engaged with. We’ve been able to launch a successful new membership project with the guidance of the Lab!”—Ayesha Abbasi, APEN

Across feedback data streams, members consistently lifted up the Lab’s leadership on strategic climate communications (including storytelling, audience segmentation, positive vs. negative framing, the effectiveness of identity and values-based appeals, and social norms) as well as policymaker contact research.

“Climate Generation was working on a large narrative project, and wanted to test out new language to encourage people to submit a story. I attended a Lab on climate change communications, and based on the recommendations we changed our request language

to emphasize personal stories – since research suggests they can inspire legislators to act when they wouldn’t before. We ended up seeing a tremendous, positive response to the campaign – getting stories from people we had never engaged with before, from different parts of the state that have been harder for us to reach. It was encouraging to see so many people we had never engaged with before sharing their stories, and helped underscore for us the importance of testing out new approaches and being intentional in our language to inspire people to take action.”—Lauren Boritzke Smith, Climate Generation

At a higher level, the Lab’s efforts helped to socialize a “culture of learning” across the climate organizations, where advocates were more regularly considering assumptions and integrating testing. We often hear from members that they used Lab research and insights to make the case to their organizational leadership for investing in more evidence-based public-engagement strategies (including organizing and communications). Members have named the Lab as a key “external validator” that helped them “gut-check” their own instincts, feel more confident moving forward with a specific strategy, and/or with making the case for that strategy to other people at their organization.

“Climate Action Campaign - San Diego worked with the Lab on a project a couple years ago, testing the effectiveness of using peer-to-peer texting vs. email to support sustained action-taking among our activists. Based on the learnings from that experiment, I was able to successfully advocate last year to get texting put back into our budget, and we’ll be able to use peer-to-peer texting for some of our campaigns this year because, as we found through our work with the Lab, texting is more effective than sending emails.”—Ariana Criste, Climate Action Campaign - San Diego

“The Lab’s materials around ‘challenging your assumptions’ about what you think is going to be most effective by exploring related data and research has really stuck with me. For example, the policymaker contact research about how sometimes, more calls to legislators aren’t more effective. Sometimes, being smarter – instead of just bigger in your work – is the more effective strategy. That idea is something I am excited to talk through with my team, and see if there are some ways we want to look at what we’re doing and see if we can be smarter about it instead of just trying to go big.”—Ashley Hunt-Martorano, Citizens Climate Lobby

“Having a chance to reflect on what it took to create the Cleveland Solar Cooperative helped validate our assumption that at the heart of powerful organizing work is how we build relationships, create shared understanding, learn about ourselves, and build justice. I’m glad we could document that learning through this case study and hope it helps other groups of residents move toward community solar. The process of creating this case study reminded us of just how much we’d done and learned together. We built power through education; through new relationships; through new knowledge of our shared power. We built a legal infrastructure. We built knowledge of the financial infrastructure necessary to do this work.”—Jonathan Welle, Cleveland Owns

“One important piece with the Lab – and it may be related to the research DNA – is that you roll up your sleeves. And I think that’s important – it is true to being a Lab and not any other kind of organization. You’re committed to doing the work of trying to figure things out.”

—Sarah Shanley Hope, The Solutions Project

#5. The Lab strengthened the leadership capacity and skill sets of thousands of climate advocates in evidence-based approaches to campaign, organizing, and communications through our training program. Through those trainings, the Lab effectively socialized ideas around MRXC movements, strategy, and power-building.

Connected to: What are the Lab interventions that have the most impact? How are advocacy groups changing how they do their work as a result of their engagement with the Lab? How is the Lab contributing to multi-racial, cross-class movement building? How is the Lab helping create the infrastructure for greater people power?

The Lab has trained thousands of climate advocates and organizers over the past 10 years – through virtual and in-person trainings delivered in one-off, series, and peer learning cohort formats. Since 2017, almost all of our trainings have had a power and power-building orientation, consistently tethering short/medium-term strategic and tactical decisions to long-term impact.

In particular, many Lab members reflected on the role of the Lab in providing professional development and connections for new and early-career climate organizers, especially in the context of the constant flow of people in and out of movement organizations. The Lab provided consistency and stability, even when lots of organizations were undergoing significant change.

“When I started working in the climate movement back in 2012, a lot of organizations viewed public engagement and organizing as “nice to haves” – it was a very science-based movement. Organizations were focused on doing grass tops work, lobbying, and developing policy expertise, maybe doing some outreach or education. I definitely think the climate community as a whole has come to accept that organizing, communications, and public engagement in general are central to our movement work. That’s a huge culture change, and I think the Lab played a role in making the case for that shift, including providing resources and training to help organizations make that transition.”—Raz Pollex, Climate Advocacy Lab

“The Lab made me a better organizer, I am where I am today because of ways in which the Lab deepened my strategic capacity. Before I became connected to the Lab, I was going by my gut and whatever research I could find publicly-available. The Lab provided a place where the research was clearly laid out on how to build volunteer capacity and grassroots power.”

—Joshua Low, Yale Program on Climate Change Communication

“Attending a Lab workshop has enhanced the Climate Reality Project’s campaign planning process and the way we think about organizing – definitely for the better! We continue to use the Lab’s campaign planning template to be more deliberate in our campaign strategy development and decision-making. Other teams at Climate Reality Project now use the campaign planning template as well, which has helped increase the overall cohesion of advocacy work. The Lab is an excellent resource for learning and trying new strategies for your organization, and they have amazing staff to help you dig deeper on all elements of your campaign.”—Emery Kiefer, Climate Reality Project

“The Lab’s recent recruitment training was so excellent – in the breakout rooms, we were all ranting and raving in the breakout rooms about how Climate Advocacy Lab is such a top notch training organization. I was doing so many unstrategic things, drowning trying to do it all, and doing nothing right. I am really grateful for this opportunity to work with you in crafting a strong theory of change and designing a more strategic campaign.”—Donna Lee, Climate Witness Project

Some of the Lab’s most impactful trainings have been delivered as part of a peer learning cohort (PLCs), with the Lab offering PLCs over the years focused on Research + Experimentation, Operationalizing Equity + Justice Commitments, Training for Impact, and Climate + Health.

“The Lab’s training and materials on ladders of engagement have been really helpful to me, as we have experienced a lot of changes in our Chapter leadership across the Northeast – especially with burnout during the pandemic. Since the training, I’ve shifted to including different examples of leadership ladders and leadership development plans in our ‘onboarding’ conversations with new Chapter chairs, particularly with folks who are coming in without a lot of experience. The Lab’s organizing materials have helped me better equip our volunteer leaders with the skills and tools they need to be successful – from sample sign-up sheets; to tip sheets for how to delegate responsibilities to other Chapter members in ‘bite-size chunks’; the implementation of a ‘new activist form’ where leaders can understand what motivated people to join the group and also commit to specific activities; and having ‘accountability buddies.’ Since implementing some of the interventions suggested by the Lab, we’ve seen higher retention of activists among our groups. I really appreciated the range of suggestions offered, instead of an assumption that “one size” fits all volunteer leaders.”—Chris Gaynor, Climate Reality Project

“TFI introduced me to the concept of evidence-based advocacy, and it has revolutionized the way I approach my work. I have been able to apply the content in various ways, from utilizing conflict resolution skills, to managing workplace dynamics, to building stable power in my advocacy efforts. Throughout the program, I developed new leadership skills that I was quickly able to put to use, when I had to step up as the point person on the day of a big clean cars event: making critical decisions on how to approach Toyota, managing videography choices for building our social media and overall narrative, and ensuring our volunteers felt valued and appreciated. The connections I made, the skills I developed, and the knowledge I gained through TFI has had a profound impact on me personally and has made me a more effective advocate.”—Ileagh MacIvers, Interfaith Power & Light

“The Ladder of Engagement framework we used in TFI was instrumental in developing my new campaign strategy. It reinforced the basics of power mapping and engagement strategies, grounding our efforts in foundational principles that have bolstered our campaign’s effectiveness. Conducting a SWOT analysis further empowered me by highlighting organizational strengths and opportunities alongside challenges. This shift from focusing solely on weaknesses to identifying actionable opportunities was helpful in moving the work forward, even though it is difficult at times and has barriers. The conflict management session provided essential tools for navigating challenges within coalitions, fostering smoother collaboration and more effective advocacy. Overall, TFI has been an enriching and gratifying experience. It has equipped me not only with practical skills and frameworks but also with renewed confidence and a deeper sense of purpose in my role.”—Rachel Boyce, Better Future

“Before joining TFI, I had some practical experience, but I lacked the theoretical understanding behind the methods we used. This cohort provided me with the knowledge I needed to understand the “why” behind our strategies. TFI provided me with core movement and coalition building-skills, which was really powerful.”—Joy Yakie, Acadia Center

Movement Evolution

The process of developing the Lab’s “10-Year Learning & Impact Report” also created a natural opportunity to pause and reflect on how the larger climate movement has grown and evolved over the same period.

In addition to reviewing news articles, campaign case studies, past landscape analyses and retrospectives (both ones created by the Lab and also by partner organizations) and internal strategy documents, we also had conversations with more than 25 climate advocates and organizers who have had both leadership roles in the movement and engaged with the Lab over the past decade. These conversations centered around a few main questions, all focused on 2015-2025:

- **How have you seen the climate movement evolve?**
- **Are there particular moments (campaigns, events, decisions, etc.) that you see as key inflection points?**
- **How have you seen the climate movement’s approach to public engagement and advocacy change?**
- **How have you seen the climate movement’s narrative and communications strategy change?**

Synthesis of these different streams of data revealed a number of areas of agreement, as well as of disagreement. Topline takeaways, trends, and open questions are summarized below and accompanied by supportive quotations and links, as appropriate. Insights from these conversations also helped inform our overall impact evaluation efforts, as we sought to understand how the Lab helped the climate movement plan and prepare for big events, make meaning of key moments, and capture/synthesize learnings.

Disclaimer: We know these insights are neither comprehensive nor entirely representative of the viewpoints and experiences of a movement as large and diverse as the climate movement. Still, we hope they can be a starting point for spirited conversation and ongoing dialogue – especially at this moment in time, ripe with uncertainty and challenges but also new ideas and opportunities.

“The spiral nature of the last 10 years, in particular, is notable – it’s been a non-linear trajectory. And here we are, again, experiencing another ‘turn of the wheel.’”—Sarah Shanley Hope, The Solutions Project

“The past decade has spanned both the most progress that we’ve made as a climate movement and in the last 3 months, the most backsliding and unraveling of the gains of the 50 years. It’s this really ‘quixotic’ feeling that we’re ‘in it’ right now – how can we have both the most progress and the most backlash, [and] destruction in the same period?”—Vicki Kaplan, People’s Action

“Despite what a challenging and heartbreaking movement we’re in, it is truly awesome and remarkable to think about how the movement has come, how far policy has come over the last 10 years. There’s still a lot of work to do, of course, but we’ve really accomplished so much.”
—Rosalind Jackson, Energy Foundation

We’ve largely accomplished the goal of increasing the awareness of and concern about climate.

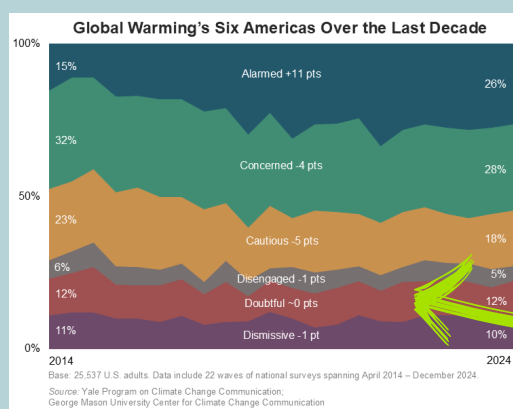
In 2015, many climate movement organizations (including the Lab) were focused on raising the salience of climate change as a social and political issue as well as increasing the understanding that it is real, human-caused, and fueling extreme weather events. While some of that work is still happening¹⁷ for the most part, our climate advocacy and communications have moved beyond that body of work. That shift has happened, in part because more people in more places have experienced the impacts of climate change.

As one person noted, “Ten years ago, we struggled with how to talk about climate change, because it still felt ‘in the future.’ Unfortunately, there’s a lot more lived experience now; many many more people who have lived through a climate catastrophe. Collectively, we have a much better understanding of what climate change is and how it impacts our lives.” (DS)

This shift is most directly reflected when we look at the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication (YPCCC’s) research over the past decade on [Global Warming’s Six Americas](#), which shows that “More Americans have become worried about global warming over the last 10 years, and most people who have changed their opinion about climate change have become more Alarmed about it.”

As another person reflected, “The public generally does care about climate and is concerned about climate change now, in a way that didn’t feel true 10 years ago. The battle we’re fighting is no longer about making people ‘aware’ or even emphasizing the impacts, but having coherent strategies that

¹⁷ Particularly on the science side, such as the [World Weather Attribution](#) research program



The percentage of Americans who are “Alarmed” about climate change increased from 15% in 2014 to 26% in 2024, according to survey data from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

effectively engage all the people who are already concerned and address the problem at the scale it requires.”

We also changed the way people talk about climate change and media coverage.

10 years ago, science-based facts and arguments dominated climate communication. Over the past decade, the community has shifted how they talk about climate change. In conversations with climate leaders, a few areas of consensus around the evolution of climate communication emerged:

- More about people, less about polar bears
- More stories, less facts
- More intersectional – exploring how climate intersects with health, housing, as well as racial and gender justice, etc.
- Greater focus on the audience and messenger (vs. just the message)
- Ongoing challenge to balance “doom and gloom” with a “hopeful path forward” persists

As climate communication strategies have evolved, media coverage of climate change has exploded. [A recent study by Brookings](#) found that media coverage of climate change in “newspapers of record” (such as The New York Times, USA Today, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, and The Wall Street Journal) has increased 300% since 2012. Similar, Media Matters’ most recent analysis found that corporate broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox) collectively aired 12 hours and 51 minutes [of climate coverage in 2024](#), compared to 146 minutes [in 2015](#) – representing a 430% increase over the last decade.

Unfortunately, climate – and especially clean energy – are more polarized now than ever, threatening progress.

While overall support for climate action and clean energy solutions has increased slightly, the issues have become more ideologically polarized over the past 10 years.

“In that full 10 years, climate has been politicized, especially at the federal level. During that time there has been conservative support for clean energy and climate action at local and state level, but it gets harder and harder, as the issues become more politicized federally.”

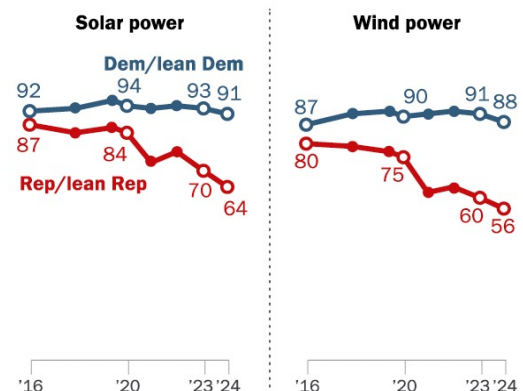
—Rosalind Jackson, Energy Foundation

This shift is especially true for clean energy¹⁸, which used to enjoy much more bipartisan support. The divergence is driven by an overall increase in political polarization as well a combination of mis/disinformation and genuine concerns about how the renewable energy buildout impacts traditionally rural landscapes.

“Thinking about the climate movement in 2015, there was a tranche of organizations and funders who still thought there was an opportunity for

Growing partisan divide in support for expanding wind, solar power in the U.S.

% who *favor* more ___ in the country



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 13-19, 2024.

¹⁸ [How Americans View National, Local, and Personal Energy Choices](#) (Pew Research Center 2024) research program

bipartisan action, like Citizens Climate Lobby and Audubon Society. I think the community has largely abandoned the dream of bipartisan climate or clean energy legislation, at least anytime soon.”—Lynsy Smithson-Stanley, Johns Hopkins

Climate activism has been on the rise over the past decade, driven by heightened concern as well as youth and Indigenous leadership.

The 2014 People’s Climate March (PCM) was the previous “high mark” for climate activism, prior to the Lab’s launch in 2015.

“The People’s Climate March was the first expression of the new climate coalition – older environmentalists, younger climate activists, environmental justice groups, Indigenous communities, and green capital – that would define our movement work over the next decade.”
—Will Lawrence, Co-Founder of the Sunrise Movement

The PCM mobilization reinvigorated the climate movement, setting the stage for a decade where activism continued to grow. Recent [research from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) which found, “Climate activism has been on the rise for some time and has intensified especially in the last five years... The year 2019 is often seen as a watershed for those that follow the politics of climate change. A wave of climate protests that started in 2018 remained strong until the pandemic restrictions in early 2020 and then regained momentum after the pandemic restrictions ended.”

Everyone we interviewed mentioned youth climate leadership (specifically the Sunrise Movement and Fridays for the Future) as a catalyst for this huge rise in climate activism, in tandem with worsening climate impacts.

“The Sunrise movement injected really bold politics into the climate movement and also did a lot to make climate an intersectional social justice issue... They were also one of the first organizations that was willing to talk about advocacy in the middle of a climate disaster. It used to be something that was not done, and now everybody does it.”—Raz Pollex, Climate Advocacy Lab

Many people also emphasized the importance of Indigenous-led mobilizations to fight the buildout of oil and gas pipelines – from Keystone XL and Dakota Access to Line 3 and Line 5 to the Atlantic Coast Pipeline – which animated and engaged a new generation of activists.

Multiple people noted that we’ve lost some “movement momentum” in recent years. The timing of the COVID pandemic, in particular, diminished opportunities to build off the energy and enthusiasm of the September 2019 Global Climate Strike, which is largely considered the “high water mark” of the climate movement.

Rise in activism has occurred alongside some of our most transformative wins and most devastating losses in the climate movement’s history.

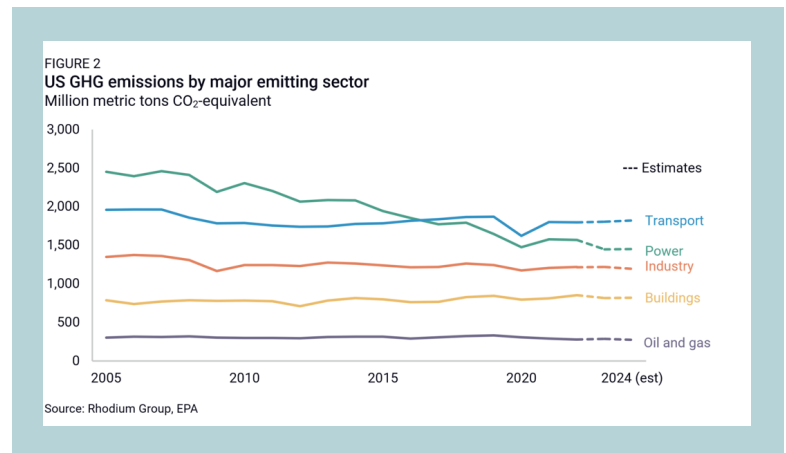
Just as climate impacts are much more real in 2025 than they were in 2015, so are many of the climate solutions our movement has been pushing for so many years. In [an interview](#) following the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in 2022, long-time climate movement leader, Bill McKibben, reflected, “When we began it was very clear we didn’t have enough power to influence anything. Watching this movement spread has been fantastic. It’s a movement that very much looks like America and the world.”

In addition to the IRA, more than 40% of people in the US now live in a place committed to 100% clean energy¹⁹, including 24 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico²⁰.

“Over the past 10 years, we’ve seen a profound shift in the Overton window on 100% clean energy, making the idea salient and then into law, in such a short period of time – hands down, an incredible win for the climate justice movement. It’s easy to forget sometimes where we were before, but the push for 100% renewable energy has been transformative: linking the narrative work to a ground-up, place-based, neighborhood-by-neighborhood, city-by-city, state-by-state strategy.”—Sarah Shanley Hope, The Solutions Project

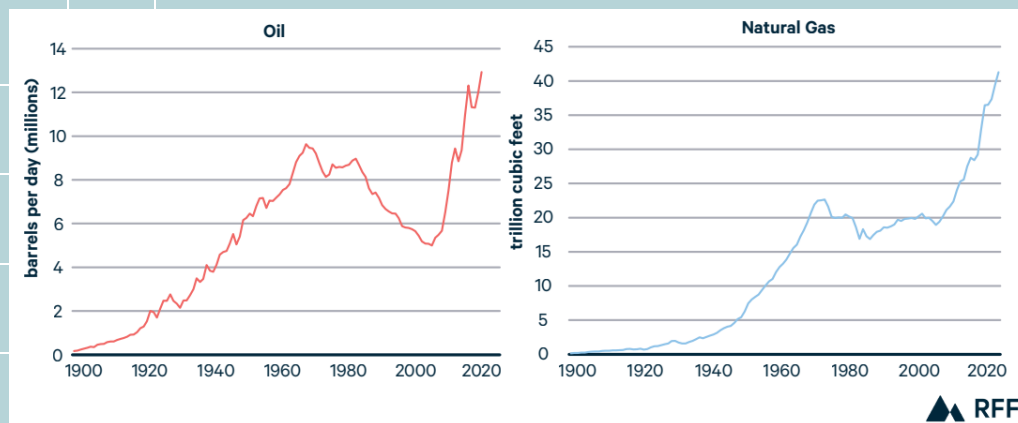
While there’s been incredible growth in the renewable energy sector, demand for energy in the US has also increased steadily over the past 10 years. As a result, US greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions remain about 20% below 2005 level²¹, with about half the reductions occurring since 2015.

Similarly, we have both celebrated some big wins and mourned some big losses on the “Stop the bad” and “Keep it in the ground” fronts. The US now leads the globe in oil and gas production²², with significant increases coming in the past decade with the expansion of fracking.



The climate movement is more diverse and intersectional in our approach – and we still have a long way to go.

In addition to the importance of youth climate leadership, every single person we talked to noted the increasing diversity of the climate movement over the past decade and, as a result, the



¹⁹ [2024 Report: Clean Energy Success in the States](#), League of Conservation Voters

²⁰ [Table of 100% Clean Energy States](#), Clean Energy States Alliance

²¹ [Preliminary US Greenhouse Gas Estimates for 2024](#) (Rhodium Group, 2025)

²² [Booming and Busting: The Mixed Fortunes of US Oil and Gas-Producing Regions](#) (Resources for the Future, 2025)

movement's increasing intersectional approach to climate and energy policies.

Hundreds of new environmental and climate justice organizations and coalitions formed over the past decade (or shortly before), many supported by a growing number of philanthropic intermediaries²³ focused on funding groups with a member base rooted in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities and an intersectional approach.

While these efforts became front and center following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, most people noted that the shift started to accelerate after the 2016 election.

“In the last 10 years, we have seen progress in the push to increase diversity within environmental and climate spaces, which have been white-led and dominated for so long.”

—Refugio Mata, Resource Media

Across the board, people acknowledged that this trend has not come with substantial conflict, setbacks, and harm to BIPOC leaders who experienced everything from tokenization and double standards to overt aggression.

“What’s come slowest, where we’ve had some of the greatest gains but also the greatest losses, is the depth of a racial, gender, class lens on the work. So the ‘ground up’ strategies for change that are rooted in communities that are most proximate to the problem and therefore the most powerful in their solutions. I don’t think you can look back on the last decade and not elevate justice and movement-building, ground-up theories of change as one of the top characteristics. Unfortunately, there were also a lot of performative actions in addition to substantive efforts for change.”—Sarah Shanley Hope, The Solutions Project

“The climate movement started grappling with its roots of affluent whiteness and non-profit spaces in 2020. That shift, although it was difficult, ultimately made the movement stronger and really built those bridges and showed us that we needed to build those movements with other people. We are still learning how to do this effectively and grappling with the fact that our base continues to be pretty white.”—Gabby Heidrich, Climate Advocacy Lab

“Stating the obvious, every win I’ve been a part of – including IRA – was only possible because of more diverse coalitions and the communities that have pulled together to demand action. It’s just a handful of white-led enviro groups, but an authentic demonstration and a wide variety of stakeholders pushing for progress which I think it is worth acknowledging and celebrating, how much more diverse the set of stakeholders calling for action.”—Rosalind Jackson, Energy Foundation

The last decade also brought about significant changes in who sets broader strategy across the movement. Overall growth in the movement (with many new organizations forming at the local, state, and federal level) as well as leadership changes, internal organizational turmoil, and changing political conditions have all shifted the center of power within the climate movement – which, historically, rested with large, DC-based “green groups.”²⁴

²³ Building Equity and Alignment for Environmental Justice (2013), Climate and Energy Equity Fund (2016), Movement Voter Project (2016), Mosaic (2018), Hive Fund for Gender and Climate Justice (2019)

²⁴ “Green group” is both an informal designation for large, legacy non-profits like the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), League of Conservation Voters (LCV), National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and the Sierra Club as well as the name of a coalition of organizations that met regularly to set and coordinate around strategy, until the entity disbanded in 2021.

Increased focus on power, power-building, and organizing.

A number of climate leaders remarked on how ideas around social movements and power-building have become more central to climate movement strategy over the past 10 years. Many of these conversations started in the wake of the 2016 election, as climate leaders grappled with how to most effectively channel the energy of the “resistance,” absorb new activists into their programs, and plot both defensive and offensive strategies.

“Too often, the climate community was mistaking mobilizations for movements. Many of the big organizations were more obsessed with scale than with power.”—Lynsy Smithson-Stanley, Johns Hopkins

“A key character shift in the last 10 years has been the growing focus on power, and really having a power analysis. We have a much better understanding as a movement of the center force of power and of power-building – the evolution of the Lab is a great reflection of these shifts writ-large.”—Sarah Shanley Hope, The Solutions Project

“Appreciation that organizing and power-building needs to be part of our long-term strategy, percolating through more parts of our movement – vs. an overreliance on persuasion and mobilizing.”—Justin Rolfe-Redding, Climate Advocacy Lab

The emergence of the Sunrise Movement in 2017 exemplified this shift, with a clear power analysis and strategy grounded in research from past civil rights movements.

“The biggest development in the climate during that period was the rise of the the youth climate movement and Sunrise Movement, and with that the development of a clear power analysis and engagement in politics with a clear power analysis – actually developing the power of the climate movement that, in concert with lots of other things going on, led to some major wins that set the tone and reshuffled the playing field.”—Vicki Kaplan, People’s Action

A new wave of conversations about power are emerging, as the movement contends with this next political chapter.

The movement’s center of power has become more diffuse; our coalitions feel more fractured.

Nearly everyone commented on the ways in which climate leadership has evolved over the past decade, noting markers such as the dissolution of the Green Group and creation of new formations, such as the [Equitable and Just Climate Platform](#) and [United Frontline Table](#).

“When I think about a lesson from the last decade – we have to go slow to go fast. Movement has become really fractured and reactionary – there are many opportunities for progress at the Federal level. People are trying to figure out how to invest and build a local base, but we’ve lost some of those skills. It’s been a lot of ‘back to the drawing board.’ Looking back, there were also a lot of ‘false choices’ around grasstops and grassroots, which reflected a scarcity mindset, and a lot of missed opportunities to lean in and show up for each other. There were also a lot of well-intentioned but also performative efforts to diversify the movement, and we missed an opportunity to fully politicize the base. Now we’re seeing how many of those people weren’t truly bought in on foundational beliefs of equity and justice, and now we’ve lost them on the spectrum of support.”—Assata Harris, Climate Advocacy Lab

Based on feedback from the Lab community following the report’s release, the Lab team realized that we had struck a chord and started to make plans to deliver additional, related programming. In the spring of 2024, the Lab facilitated a four-part training series to help climate advocates apply recommendations from the report in the context of their own work, as well as receive 1-on-1 coaching around challenges they are facing in coalition work. 40 climate leaders from 16 different state-based coalitions participated in sessions focused on: [Building the Coalition, Ways to Work Together, Accountability & Conflict Management](#), and [Alignment & Growth](#).

Climate Movement Timeline

2015

- **May:** The Climate Advocacy Lab launches!
- **June:** Pope’s Encyclical on climate, *Laudato Si* released
- **June:** The Lancet publishes its first “Countdown on Health and Climate Change,” elevating the growing importance of both research and communications at that intersection.
- **September:** Shell announces it is dropping plans to drill in the Arctic – a major victory for climate activists, who had staged a major action to block the path of Shells’s oil vessel just weeks earlier.
- **October:** The “Building Public and Political Will for Climate Action” conference takes place at Yale University.
- **November:** “Keep it in the ground” activists celebrated two major victories: President Obama finally bent to years of grassroots pressure and denied the Keystone XL Pipeline and BLM (Bureau of Land Management) announced they were halting a huge oil and gas lease sale on public lands in Utah.
- **December:** COP21 in Paris concludes with the ratification of the Paris Climate Agreement, in which countries agreed to reduce emissions enough to hold global warming below 1.5°C.

2016

- **Spring - Winter:** The Dakota Access/Standing Rock Pipeline Protests become a “crucible” for progressive movement-building.
- **November:** Donald Trump is elected to his first term as President, defeating Hillary Clinton.
- **December:** The Illinois “Future Energy Jobs Act” is signed into law

2017

- **January:** Immediately following President Trump’s inauguration, he begins dismantling the Obama Administration’s climate-action accomplishments, including reversing the official State Department decision on the Keystone XL pipeline, gutting the Clean Power Plan, and withdrawing the United States from the Paris Agreement.
- **April:** Hundreds of thousands of people pour into the streets for the People’s Climate March & March for Science.
- **August:** Much of the climate movements’ attention turned to disaster relief and recovery efforts as Hurricane Harvey pummels Houston.

- **September:** Just a few weeks later, Hurricane Maria hits Puerto Rico, leaving much of the island without electricity for months.

2018

- **July: The head of Trump's EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), Scott Pruitt, resigns amidst the threat of numerous ethics investigations.** His departure marked one of the climate movement's first big wins of the Trump administration, as organizations had been organizing to "#BootPruitt" since shortly after his confirmation.
- **August:** Greta Thunberg sits outside the Swedish Parliament for the first "Skolstrejk för klimatet" – unknowingly re-ignite the youth climate movement.
- **September:**
 - ◊ Tens of thousands of people across the US take part in "Rise for Climate" protests, including more than 30,000 in the Lab's hometown of San Francisco.
 - ◊ Just a few days later, California Governor Jerry Brown signs the 100% Clean Energy Act into law, making it the largest state in the US committed to 100% clean energy.
- **November:**
 - ◊ The Midterms elections resulted in a pro-climate majority in the House of Representatives for the first time since 2011.
 - ◊ **Young people gather in DC to stage a sit-in at then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office.** Organized by the Sunrise Movement and supported by new Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), activists called for a "Green New Deal" and challenged the Democratic Party's lack of climate ambition. The protest garnered significant national media attention and – coupled with the growing youth climate strike movement – marked the beginning of a new era of climate politics.

2019

- **March: The head of Trump's EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), Scott Pruitt, resigns amidst the threat of numerous ethics investigations.** His departure marked one of the climate movement's first big wins of the Trump administration, as organizations had been organizing to "#BootPruitt" since shortly after his confirmation.
- **July:**
 - ◊ New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act is signed into law.
 - ◊ "[Equitable and Just National Climate Platform](#)" launched
- **September:** Youth climate strike movement culminates in a "global climate strike," with millions of people participating in protests around the world.

2020

- **March:** COVID shuts down much of the world, greatly impacting climate and energy work.
- **May:** The murder of George Floyd ignites a summer of Black Lives Matter protests and larger reckoning around race justice in the US.

- **November:** Joe Biden is elected President, defeating Donald Trump.

2021

- **May:** The Washington Climate Commitment Act (CCA) and Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act are signed into law.
- **September:** The Illinois Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) is signed into law.
- **December:** The House narrowly passes “Build Back Better” but Senator Joe Manchin blocks legislation moving forward in the Senate.

2022

- **April:** Climate activists hold “Build Back Better” rallies nationwide, including a rally outside the White House that drew at least 1,000 people.
- **August:** The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is signed into law – the most comprehensive piece of federal climate and environmental justice legislation ever passed.
- **October:** Activists with “Just Stop Oil” throw soup at Vincent Van Gogh’s “Sunflowers” painting, igniting a spirited debate about the effectiveness of disruptive tactics

2023

- **February:** Minnesota’s 100% Clean Electricity bill is signed into law.
- **June:** The Oregon legislature passes a “Climate Resilience Package,” allocating over \$90 million to climate resilience initiatives across the state.
- **September:** The United Auto Workers go on strike with support from many climate organizations, underscoring new alliances between climate and labor.

2024

- **March:** Launched Clean Energy Hub (formerly IRA Hub)
- **Summer of Heat:** Targeting Wall Street investments.
- **November:** Donald Trump is re-elected, defeating Kamala Harris.
- **December:** TFI 5 cohort wrap

What's Next

In the first half of 2025, we saw renewable energy capacity continue to outpace new fossil fuel generating capacity, a trend that has grown over the last few years. Collectively, renewable energy accounted for around 90% of the U.S.'s new installed capacity in 2024, now making up 30% of the country's large-scale power generating capacity. For the fossil fuel industry, the writing is on the wall: The future is renewable, clean energy. And the future is now.

It may not always feel like it, but we're winning.

For the last decade, the Lab has helped to support and train thousands of advocates to build stronger, more resilient, and more equitable campaigns that got us to where we are today. Ten years ago, the Lab was built on the foundational understanding that engagement with grassroots communities and advocates across the country was the key to winning on climate.

The natural outcome of that foundation is that we've spent a decade building and strengthening relationships with frontline and fence-line communities, where the impacts of climate change are most deeply felt, and where the solutions are most deeply rooted. While the work of the Lab has always been intersectional, the work ahead of us and the measure of its success, lies in expanding the network of that intersectionality.

Our struggles are inextricably linked, and our futures are bound together with advocates from communities working on immigration, agriculture, clean water, overfishing, defense of democracy, freedom of the press, and human rights, to name but a few. The resources we have developed for the U.S. climate movement belong in the hands of advocates working across all these critical movements. Including their voices and learnings are vital as we continue to evolve as an organization; expanding our network of intersectionality will help us create more space for learning and collaboration, in the fight for collective liberation.

More than 7,500 climate advocates have been Lab members in the last decade, with 5,000 of those advocates still active members. As we embark on the next ten years of the Lab, we're excited to expand our learning and our reach, strengthening not only the U.S. climate movement, but also our allies in the fight for progress and an equitable future.

In solidarity,

Apolinar Gonzales, Executive Director, & the Climate Advocacy Lab team

Partner Appendix

ACE (Action for the Climate Emergency)

The Lab has partnered with ACE (Action for the Climate Emergency; formerly the Alliance for Climate Education) for over 10 years to test key questions and innovative approaches to youth climate organizing and communication.



ACE first partnered with the Lab over a decade ago to test different ways of building “efficacy” among its youth volunteers. In particular, they wanted to explore a strategy core to their theory of change: that giving young people the training and resources necessary to have powerful conversations with their parents about why they care about climate change (and why it is important to take action now) would be transformative for both parties. The Lab provides resources for ACE to work two social scientists – one who researches the psychology of climate change and one who studies intergenerational knowledge transfer – to design and implement a research project.

In the summer of 2015, ACE convened focus groups in Raleigh, Chicago, and San Jose to gather input, feedback, and ideas on their current campaigns. Feedback from participants emphasized the:

- Need to leverage social media/online platforms;
- Effective use of celebrities and high visibility partners to serve as resources and guides for how to go about engaging in conversations about climate; and
- Desire for support among young people (through in-person trainings, an app, an interactive website, video, or specific databases) to increase feelings of confidence in their outreach efforts.

The Lab partnered with ACE again in 2016 to support two research projects with ShareProgress exploring effective strategies for online outreach to young people. They found:

- Advertising on Instagram to reach youth was more cost effective than using Facebook, and social media ads’ success varied dramatically based on the image used in the ad.
- Instagram’s Carousel ad display was no more engaging than single-image ads, and including the actual dates in before-and-after climate impact photos (receding glaciers, for instance) generated higher response rates than labeling such photos as “Your Parent’s World” and “Your World.”



Image 6. Instagram "Lake" Ad layout

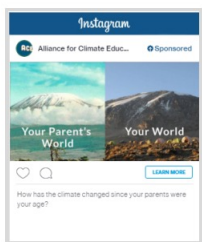


Image 7. Instagram "Mountain" Ad layout

Online testing via Facebook and Instagram found that an image showing dramatic changes in the water levels of Lake Urmia in Iran outperformed ones showing changes in the snows of Mount Kilimanjaro.

The hosted a webinar with ACE team members and research partners in 2016 to share learnings on [Innovative Outreach Tactics to Engage Youth On Climate](#) with the full Lab community.

A more thorough [evaluation of ACE's, "Have the Talk" campaign](#) found that training young people to have a climate conversation is effective. Young people can learn how to facilitate an open-ended dialogue about this challenging subject with their parents with positive outcomes for both youth and parents. Research learnings also fed directly into the organization's work to mobilize thousands of young people through a relational voter education program.



In more recent years, the ACE and the Lab have continued to work closely together to test new approaches, analyze the data, share results, and iterate upon learnings, including:

- An updated overview of tactics for [sparking and sustaining youth action](#)
- Text messages to [turn out young climate voters](#)
- A case study on the effectiveness of [leveraging "social norms" language in Facebook ads](#) to recruit new teachers
- Learnings from the [Class of 0000 campaign](#)
- An overview of how they use [Instagram for storytelling](#)

As ACE's long-time, former Director of Research, Reb Anderson, reflected:

"ACE's research partnership with the Lab has been invaluable. We have learned so much through these research projects that has directly affected how we do our work."

California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA)

Developing infrastructure for a community polling program

Following the 2018 People's Climate March in San Francisco, the California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) partnered with the Climate Advocacy Lab to run a **statewide climate polling program** across their member organizations, with the goal of better understanding what moves their communities to take action on climate.



The poll demonstrated that broad concern about the impacts of both climate change and air pollution among CEJA's constituents in the San Diego and the Inland Empire. It also reaffirmed their strategy to organize around reducing warehouse and trucks emissions and shutting down oil wells and refineries in the region.

Climate Justice Polling Findings in Inland Region

Of the 820 constituents, our poll demonstrated that even without much information provided by CEJA are concerned with climate change.

87% of constituents of the Inland Region identified themselves as being impacted by Climate Change and 64% constituents of color said that climate change disproportionately affects low income communities, reaffirming that individuals who live with the most acute impacts of climate change understand that and can be organized.

45% of constituents identified pollution as their biggest climate concern which resonates with the ongoing impacts of diesel trucks and warehouses

Future policy solutions regarding transportation are traffic and road safety, air pollution from commercial trucks, safety when biking or walking will resonate with this group.

At 60%, the majority of these constituents are concerned and would be an ideal group to reach to shut down oil wells, gas plants and refineries to address climate change.



Civic Engagement Program Manager Mabel Tsang reflected:

These in-depth conversations provided valuable insights and learnings to help improve our communications moving forward, be better poised to mobilize our base, and increase engagement over the long-term.

This was an opportunity to have in-depth conversations with communities in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese to learn how residents in communities of color perceive climate issues, what messages are most effective for them, and how we can expand a shared, statewide identity of residents who see climate justice as a critical issue to inform our organizing strategies in the future.

Finally, the surveys were targeted in the districts of key California state legislators, and CEJA used the polling results to help deepen relationships and demonstrate strong support among those policymakers' constituents for bold action on climate change.

Building internal capacity for digital message testing

CEJA then partnered with the Lab team to test a variety of messages with their members, analyzing the difference in effectiveness and resonance between two distinct message frames -- “Fight Back Against Big Oil” and “Protect Community Health.”



Fight Back Against Big Oil



Protect Community Health

CEJA’s Executive Director Gladys Limon shared:

We were pleasantly surprised that there were no statistically detectable differences between the ‘Fight Big Oil’ and ‘Protect Community Health’ frames tested, which provides further insights into the priorities and concerns of our communities. Through this project, we received valuable experience in learning the nuances of these two frames and how they can inform the development of broader climate narrative work.

The Climate Advocacy Lab team was invested, accessible, and extremely supportive throughout the project, including providing research and analytical expertise that we do not hold. We appreciated the support from the Climate Advocacy Lab team and their unique contributions to evidence-based efforts to advance meaningful climate advocacy!

In April 2020, as organizations across the country were making quick pivots to respond and adapt to the COVID pandemic, the Lab partnered with CEJA to help them run their Facebook ads for the first time, testing frames around corporate accountability and community health.

Ads with top share rates...



“Response efficacy”
1.05%



“Inoculation”
1.01%

...attack fossil fuel companies & talk jobs

April 17 – April 29 Share rate= shares/impression, 11,596–12,775 impressions per ad

The test both provided interesting insights about the relative effectiveness of these message frames with CEJA's digital audiences, as well as built their internal capacity to do additional image and message testing via Facebook ads in the future. The top-performing ads focused on economic opportunities in building back post-pandemic and called out fossil fuel companies for profiting from government "bail out" funds, as so many community members suffered.

Communications Associate Isa Flores-Jones reflected:

I appreciate the experience of working with the Lab, of the support that you all provided both in terms of the Facebook messaging project and also the resources in general. I have attended several webinars and trainings and found them really helpful in terms of building out our social media.

Supporting the pivot to online organizing during COVID

In July of 2020, CEJA reached out to the Lab for support around virtual event planning, as they needed to move their annual policymaker education Congreso online due to COVID. Special Projects Manager Cassie Gardener Manjikian shared:

We had never run such a large virtual event before and having support and 'best practice' resources from the Lab was invaluable. Our Congreso ended up running so smoothly, and I really have the Lab team to thank for walking me through all of Zoom's features, reviewing materials in advance of the event, and swiftly answering my questions leading up to today.

We ultimately had over 120 activists participate in the Congreso, and people really enjoyed the interactive features, like live polling and breakout rooms. Nearly a quarter of the participants had never used Zoom before and the Lab's ongoing support, both leading up to and during the event, was so critical to ensuring accessibility for the communities we serve.

Flexing their own "evidence-based" advocacy muscles

Civic Engagement Director Mabel Tsang reflected:

The 2018 polling program also helped build CEJA's constituent contact data infrastructure and increased our capacity for running future, multi-lingual polling and survey programs in partnership with local, community-based organizations.

In 2020, CEJA utilized that expanded capacity and data infrastructure when they conducted two additional rounds of community polling to support their organizing and civic engagement work – fighting for stronger pesticide rules in the Central Valley and for increasing oil and gas setbacks in impacted communities.

The Lab is grateful to CEJA for ongoing partnership opportunities and proud to have worked closely with their team to increase their organizational capacity for community polling, message testing across digital platforms, and implementing key campaign tactics, like running virtual events.

League of Conservation Voters (LCV)

The Lab partnered closely with LCV between 2014 and 2017, as they built out their distributed organizing program supporting a variety of field tests and experiments exploring how to more effectively identify, activate, and move volunteers up a ladder of engagement. Long-time LCV President Gene Karpinski served on the Lab's founding Advisory Board from 2015-2017. Lisa Hoyos, LCV's Senior Director of Climate and Clean Energy Solutions, has served as an [Advisory Board](#) member since 2018.



Experimental collaborations between LCV and the Lab revealed new insights related to **volunteer engagement**, including:

- Asking voters in North Carolina to [commit to “tell a friend”](#) about an environmental issue they care about led to significantly more engagements with volunteers than asking voters just to sign a petition.
- Asking volunteers in North Carolina to [commit to a 2-hour shift](#)* led to significantly more phone banking shifts completed than asking volunteers to commit to making 20 voter contacts.
- [Social pressure language did not increase the likelihood](#) volunteers in Wisconsin would either sign up or complete a volunteer shift, revealing a key difference in motivating volunteer engagement vs. voter turnout.
- Volunteers in Wisconsin who initially declined a volunteer ask to phonebank voters for the election but accepted a “lower-bar” ask to write handwritten letters were significantly [more likely to volunteer to phonebank later](#) on in the campaign (when asked a second time,) validating the theory behind “foot-in-the-door” actions.

LCV's former Deputy National Field Director Evan Korshvan reflected:

Working with the Lab has helped us identify opportunities for greater efficiency and efficacy in our volunteer recruitment and development, strengthening all our programs. The Lab has also helped strengthen the environmental community, creating a supportive space for us to better each other's priorities and strategies as well as build on each other's ideas and work towards common goals. The Lab really embodies an ethos of 'movement generosity.

LCV and the Lab also experimented with **innovative approaches to voter education and turnout**:

- [Leveraging social relationships](#) in a GOTV mailer significantly improved voter turnout in a Michigan election.
- [Sending a “voter report card”](#) can be just as effective as sharing a neighbors' vote history, what had been considered the most effective social pressure tactic to this point.
- Asking potential voters to [rate how important it was for them to vote](#), and then ask them to justify that ranking, led to increased voter turnout in Iowa (regardless of the individual's self-reported ranking).
- Asking potential voters to [record a message on why voting was important](#) and then replaying that message back to the voter prior to the election significantly increased voter turnout in Colorado.

- Wisconsin voters who received a [letter reminding them to vote](#) were more likely to turnout than those who didn't, but there wasn't a statistically-significant difference in turnout between those who received typed vs. handwritten letters.

We also worked together to develop and test existing microtargeting models, finding:

- Catalyst's ["Environmental Activist" model was most effective](#) at predicting which individuals agreed to participate in a patch-through call and the "Partisanship" model was most effective at predicting which individuals agreed to a 1-on-1 meeting with an organizer.
- The Environmental Activist model was also the [most effective among Latinos](#) at predicting which individuals will agree to sign a petition.

LCV's former Data Director, Amit Mistry, reflected:

The model evaluation we did with the Lab while was hugely impactful and informative. While we saw that some models performed better and could provide some targeting recommendations, the bigger takeaway for me is that we didn't need to spend a lot of money creating new models. Understanding that allowed us to save that money – easily \$100k or more – and put the resources toward supporting more organizing work."

In 2017, the Lab and LCV also partnered to deliver a [series of data training workshops](#) for climate activists across the country, including in Denver, Chicago, Philadelphia, Missoula, and Raleigh. Each workshop explored the:

- Case for data-driven programs and the "Data Cycle"
- Tip and tricks for using Excel to analyze organizing data
- Basics of using the VAN (Voter Activation Network)

The Lab's ongoing research and training partnership with LCV helped advance the field's understanding of evidence-based and data-driven approaches to climate organizing – and also created a space for sharing and iterating on those learnings.

"The Lab provides a space to talk through challenges and share things that have been tried (whether they worked or not) since we all can't try everything -- and that way we can build off what someone else did. Through Lab convenings, I have been able to meet lots of partners and potential partners and build better relationships that otherwise would have just been over the phone or email and not as trusting and open."—Amit Mistry, former LCV Data Director

PennEnvironment

The Lab worked closely with PennEnvironment between 2015 and 2019 as they built out their “Climate Defenders” organizing program.



In 2016, the Lab partnered with the Analyst Institute to help **build and test a “climate action patch model”** that helped identify voters in PA who were likely to take action on climate issues and then asked them to make a call to their elected official in support of specific policies. Use of the model improved PennEnvironment’s patch-through rate by 18% (compared to past patch-through rates) with an estimated cost-savings of 40% (compared to previous organizational efforts to engage non-members in making patch calls on climate.) Use of the model also increased the percentage of non-white folks who made calls by 39%, which helped PennEnvironment significantly increase the racial and ethnic diversity of their activist base. The model also outperformed the model PennEnvironment had previously used (Catalist’s Environmental Activist model) by 24 percentage points.

Over the next 3 years, PennEnvironment built on the initial findings to test a number of other questions key to the development of their Climate Defenders program. They found:

- The “climate action patch model” was more effective in identifying people willing to meet with (vs. just make a phone call to) legislators in PA (vs. using the Environmental Activist model).
- A “**first volunteer ask**” of having people make a phone call or attend an activist event was more likely to lead to sustained action-taking (in this case, participating in at least 3 more Climate Defender activities) vs. a first ask of meeting with a decision-maker in-person.
- Giving volunteers more “agency” (or ownership over campaign decisions) vs. more routine or straightforward volunteer asks did lead to an increase in volunteering and leadership. PennEnvironment implemented changes to their organizing model based on those findings.
- For PennEnvironment to recruit 100 volunteers for an event, they would require 62,500 emails and cell phone numbers for digital-only contact and 2,101 phone numbers for phone outreach and **created a spreadsheet calculator** to help organizers make their own list contact efficiency decisions.

Across research projects, they also tested how personal phone contact, when layered on top of email and SMS contact, affects volunteer recruitment rates. The goal of maximizing staff time efficiency was to better understand their organization’s “break-even” point in which their traditional model of personal phone contacts (effective, but time-consuming) is matched by digital-only contact (which yields participation, though at lower rates).

PennEnvironment Field Director Flora Cardoni reflected on working with Lab saying:

Working with the Lab has helped to inform and improve PennEnvironment’s deep organizing model and allowed us to more effectively recruit and move volunteers up the ladder of engagement. The evidence-based materials and resources the Lab provides has also helped shape and increase the effectiveness of our climate messaging and has given us tons of polling and data to back up our work. It has also allowed me to be connected to a whole network of advocates and social scientists doing this work across the country, which has provided much needed motivation and optimism as well as driven more collaborative work!

PennEnvironment is one key organization in the statewide coalition of organizations that have helped transform the conversation about climate and energy issues in Pennsylvania, leading PA to develop a climate action plan and join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) in 2020. Of course, there's still a lot of work to do to wind down the fossil fuel and petrochemical industries that still hold a lot of influence in state politics. Pennsylvania is currently the fourth-largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States.

The evidence-based organizing model that supports PennEnvironment's Climate Defenders will be key to building the political power necessary for transformative climate solutions toward a just transition.