

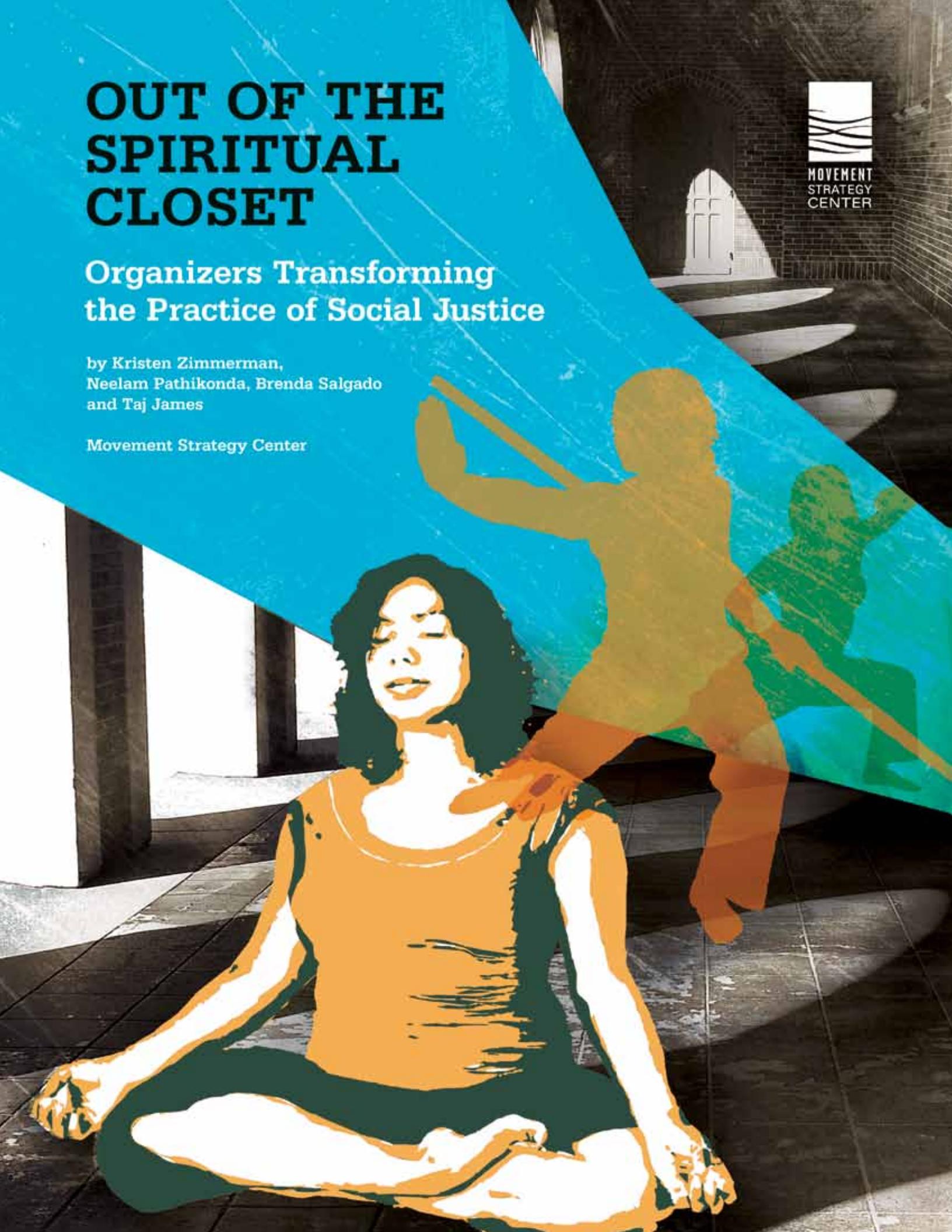


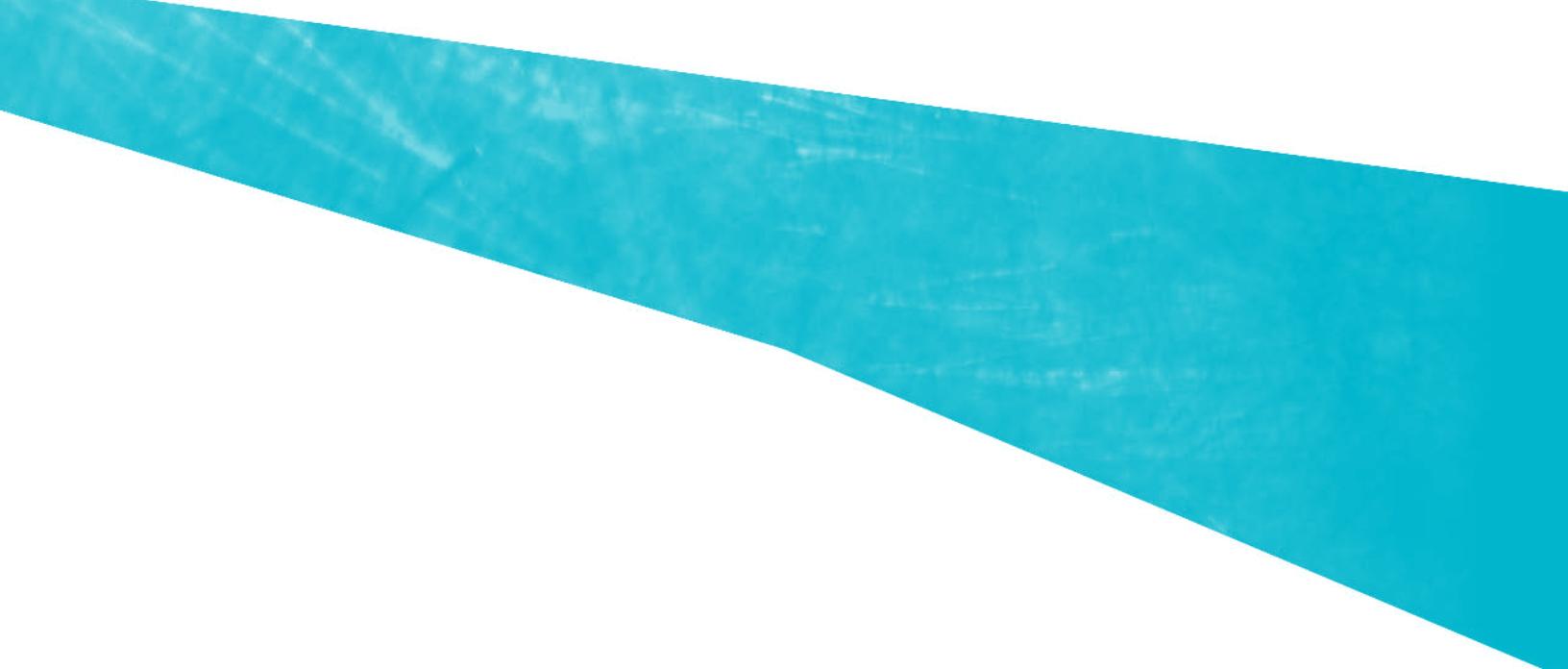
OUT OF THE SPIRITUAL CLOSET

Organizers Transforming the Practice of Social Justice

by Kristen Zimmerman,
Neelam Pathikonda, Brenda Salgado
and Taj James

Movement Strategy Center





**Out of the Spiritual Closet:
Organizers Transforming the Practice of Social Justice**
By Kristen Zimmerman, Neelam Pathikonda, Brenda Salgado and Taj James

©2010 by the Movement Strategy Center (MSC)
Commissioned by the The Fetzer Institute, The Seasons Fund for Social Transformation and Hidden
Leaf Foundation
Printed in the U.S.A. ~ March 2010
ISBN 0-9754 778-2-X

All rights reserved. Parts of this report may be quoted or used as long as the authors and the Movement
Strategy Center are duly recognized. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted for
commercial purpose without prior permission.

SUGGESTED CITATION: Zimmerman, K., Pathikonda, N., Salgado, B., James, T. (2010). Out of
the Spiritual Closet: Organizers Transforming the Practice of Social Justice. Oakland, CA: Movement
Strategy Center.

To order any of our publications, visit www.movementstrategy.org or contact:

Movement Strategy Center
1611 Telegraph Ave., Suite 510
Oakland, CA 94612
Ph 510.444.0640
Fax 510.444.9810
info@movementstrategy.org

Out of the Spiritual Closet: Organizers Transforming the Practice of Social Justice

By Kristen Zimmerman, Neelam Pathikonda, Brenda Salgado and Taj James





Akaya Windwood leads the group in a moment of reflection and gratitude at the Deep Change gathering.
Photo: 2009 Willie Davis.

Contents

1	LETTING GO OF THE TRAPEZE
4	SEEKING A NEW WAY
8	Methodology and Scope of this Paper
9	Transformative Movement Building: MSC's Framework for Social Change
13	WHERE ARE WE STUCK?
20	COMING OUT: STORIES FROM THE TRENCHES
28	THE NEW WAY
36	CONCLUSIONS
38	RECOMMENDATIONS
APPENDIX	
39	Bibliography
40	Worksheets: Understanding the Field and Shaping the Landscape
42	Field Map: The Transformative Movement Building Community
45	Frameworks From the Field
46	Liberation Spirituality Strategy Map
48	Transformational Organizing Landscape Map
50	Tree of Contemplative Practice
51	Organizing Map with Spirit at the Center
52	Coming Soon: Transformative Movement Building in Frontline Organizations
54	Deep Change: Images of a Changing Movement
55	Attributions and Appreciations



Altar built at MSC's Sustainable Organizing Training. Photo: 2004 Kristen Zimmerman.

Letting Go of the Trapeze

Gihan Perera sighed, sitting at his desk in the office of the Miami Workers Center, a grassroots community organizing project for low-wage workers in Miami. *There must be a better way*, he thought. At the time, the Workers Center was experiencing high turnover due to staff conflict and overwork, as well as dwindling enthusiasm and participation among members, and new lows in turn-out to events and meetings. As a leader in the organization, Perera was depleted and felt more like a surgeon placing Band-Aids on third-degree burns than an inspiring leader organizing for economic and racial justice. His work had become less relevant to the people's lives he was trying to change. He felt isolated and disconnected from his social justice colleagues. Lack of a broader strategy for community organizing made many in the organization feel like they were giving their lives to build a pyramid without communication or a shared sense of vision.

Gihan Perera thought back to how he started in social justice work. The need for deep, fundamental social change had always boiled in his blood. At a young age, he had accompanied his aunt and uncle to protests for better wages and against war. In high school, he started a peace and justice club. The excitement from building and creating something with others sustained him. He had become executive director of the Miami Workers Center five years earlier, and was both excited and frustrated by what he'd been able to accomplish in that time.

Things changed when Perera attended Rockwood Leadership Institute's two-year program for executive directors. At the time, he felt challenged in his leadership. While the Workers Center began as a handful of people with shared political ideology, it had grown into something more. He needed help. Initially, he thought he needed management techniques and tools to help him grow and maintain the staff. What he found at Rockwood was something much more personal and profound. He resisted at first. Looking back, he says, "I thought I needed a movement MBA to figure out this crisis, not some spiritual hokey pokey." It took six months for Perera to realize he needed a shift in his personal leadership practice. "It wasn't systems or supervision skills that I needed — the crucial



element was recognizing how my ability to lead came from my center. When I am centered, I make good decisions and build an organization that is grounded in the present."

This was a total shift for Perera, a hardened anti-spiritualist who equated spiritual practice with religious practice. "I had been deeply committed to Left ideology. But, I began to see that it had become a crutch for me. It had become formulaic. I was clinging to ideology in a way that didn't allow me to trust myself and open up to being even more radical." While Perera had

sometimes sensed a conflict between his heart and his head, he knew he generally chose his intellect over his feelings. "But your head can play tricks on you when it's the only approach. I was starting to see that I was doing my best politically when I followed my heart and my instincts. I was beginning to understand that an intellectual approach is not enough to create a movement. But, I didn't think about this as spirituality."

"While I understand my experience to be spiritual, I hesitate to define it that way because, often, spirituality is defined as the negation of the material reality — as if you can transcend the realities of power, privilege and oppression. All I know is that in our current political moment, we need a new way forward."

The realization that leadership and decision making come from the heart completely shifted Perera's approach to organization building. For example, rather than starting with a strategic plan, the Workers Center carved out time for visioning, then used its vision to strategically plan. Perera's realization also changed the way he approached supervision and staff development. Instead of doing check-ins, Perera began using coaching and mentorship models. "We needed to create personal, political and spiritual alignment within our organization." This kind of alignment called for far more than just skills or political development.

Perera knew he had to build his organization from a place of values. "People need to feel like they are part of something in their lives." This meant shifting the culture of the organization, which meant transforming everything the organization did, from the campaigns to the politics. "The inner work was the glue," Perera says. "We all needed to become emotionally and spiritually intelligent for this to work."

Perera realized quickly that he needed a community to support him in maintaining his new spiritual practice. He signed up for other leadership trainings and eventually found himself in front of a Peruvian shaman. The shaman gave Perera these words: "Faith is required when there is a gap between what you know to be true and what you believe to be true. When there is no gap, when everything is aligned, you no longer need faith. The search for spirituality is to find that alignment, to live in the present." Perera has reflected on that lesson many times. "We need to put ourselves in the mental, emotional and

Taj James and Claudia Horwitz facilitate a discussion at the Deep Change gathering. Photo: 2009 Willie Davis.

spiritual realm that allows us to open up to new ways of doing things," he concludes. "We need to let go of our intellectual approach, throw away the standard script and use our centeredness, our inner knowing and spiritual wisdom. We are on a trapeze and we have to let go to catch the next one. It takes faith, courage and surrender."

Since this shift in approach, the Miami Workers Center has experienced a huge increase in its membership, victories and overall effectiveness. They just won a seat on the official election committee for transit in the city. Now, with other powerful stakeholders in the city, Miami Workers Center is reviewing developer bids for a \$10 million transit proposal. "Three years ago, it would have taken five days of political discussion to make a decision like the transit proposal. But today, it feels very natural to do it. We have re-imagined how we approach relationships, strategies, tactics and alliances. Our view of the government and targets has shifted. We have taken a chance and changed the leverage. It feels right."

Organizers participate in a visioning activity at MSC's Sustainable Organizer Training. Photo: 2004 Kristen Zimmerman.



Seeking a New Way

Perera's story reflects the journey many social justice organizers take as they grapple with how to lead in our political moment. Current global environmental, economic and political crises are calling all of us to think and act in bigger, bolder ways, stretching our vision beyond borders and across generations. And yet, our movements hardly seem ready for this task. Confronted with the burnout, isolation and fragmentation so common in the progressive movement, many leaders are seeking a "new way" to practice social justice — a way that can meet the challenges of our time, sustain our leaders and transform our movement and the world.

Progressive organizers have been searching for a renewed vision and approach to change for decades — ever since the end of the radical social movements of the 60s and 70s. But, this need dramatically intensified during the recent Bush Administration era. Empowered by the rise of the conservative and religious Right in the 1980s, 90s and 2000s, the G.W. Bush Administration was aggressively hostile to human, environmental and civil rights in the United States and around the world. The global war on terror, the massive gutting of environmental protections, the denial of global warming and the elimination and privatization of social services are just a few examples of how this Administration led with fear, ignorance and even hate. Many crucial rights established during the 1960s and 70s were dismantled in this era and progressives found themselves defensive and immobilized. While prior administrations contributed to this trend, the Bush Administration took it to an alarming new low. The Left was unable to prevent these attacks, let alone offer another vision. For many organizers this period catalyzed a crisis of faith, which ultimately led to soul searching and a new vision.

This political climate had immediate, devastating consequences for people of color and low-income communities. As environmental, social and economic conditions deteriorated, these communities were (and are) impacted first and most intensely by social injustice.

Like Perera, many organizers in this report began their journey by asking a seemingly straightforward question: How do we make our organizations or organizing practices more sustainable and effective? Perera and others working in frontline organizations longed for a new, more powerful approach to organizing. The progressive movement clearly was not winning on any level, let alone the hearts and minds of the people for whom they were fighting. The movement overall was too small, too fragmented



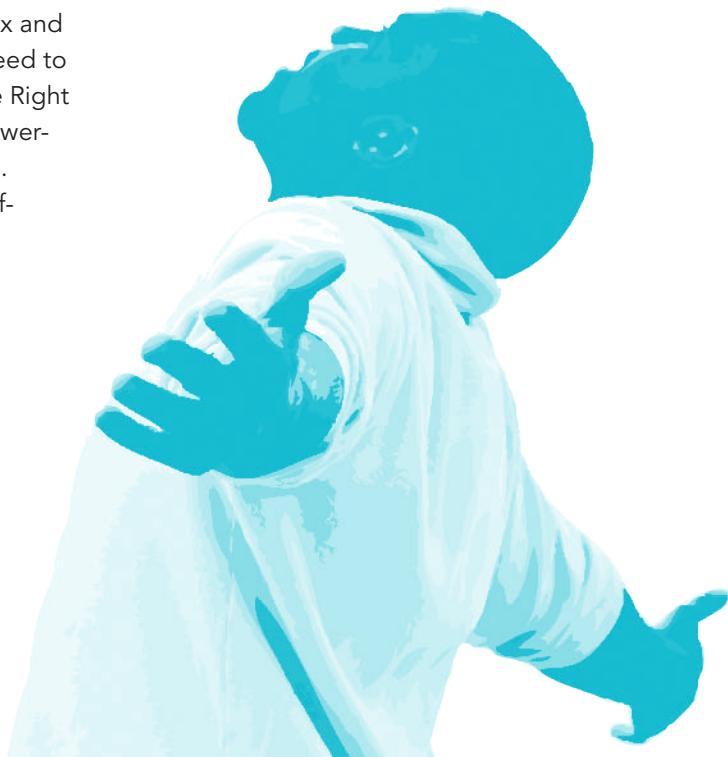
and too defensive. Too often organizers recycled the same ideas, strategies and patterns that had them stuck in the first place because it was the “rational” approach. Like most of Western society, the movement valued thinking over social/emotional intelligence and instincts. People in the movement felt drained, cut off from a vast source of wisdom and direction. Movement building organizations had become stale, failing to generate the values, connections and strategies that resonated with people.

While progressives can and do point to a rich legacy of leaders and movements grounded in spiritual practice — Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian Independence Movement, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement, and César Chávez and the Farm Workers Movement, to name a few — the Left is also deeply shaped by staunchly secular social justice work influenced by Marxist thought that is suspicious or even hostile to religion and spirituality. These secular traditions have made important contributions to our understanding of material conditions and revolutionary change, but they have also reinforced a deep split between our mind, our bodies and our spirits. This Western cultural bias draws a sharp line between inner and outer transformation, defining them in opposition to each other. Nonetheless, many within the Left have challenged this split, seeking to synthesize wisdom and practice from spiritual traditions (often focused on deep inner transformation) with social change traditions of the Left (generally focused on social analysis and systems change). This kind of leadership is not new. Even at the moments in history when these approaches to transformation have been most polarized, leaders have always emerged who sought to integrate them and bring them into balance with each other. These are some of our most inspiring and impactful leaders.

Over the last few decades the religious Right has dominated the mainstream discussion around “morals and values” in the United States. Claiming to be the moral compass for the country, they have defined a radically conservative platform for issues including abortion, welfare, LGBTQ rights and more. The Left, for the most part, has let this happen. Rather than leading with our values and vision, progressives have focused on making rational arguments for what is “right.” No matter how skilled our analysis, we have been unable to speak to the complex and holistic experiences of everyday people, to resonate with their need to be a part of something deep in their hearts and spirits. While the Right has organized people around fear, they have been even more powerful when they tapped into and met people’s desire for belonging. The Left has largely ignored these needs, contributing to our ineffectiveness in broad social change.

Hungering for Something Different

Our country is hungry for change. The campaign and election of Barack Obama spoke to this. Running on a message of hope, interconnectedness, possibility and vision, his campaign tapped into a profound desire in the





ACRJ organizer Dana Gin Parades reflects in front of altar at MSC's Sustainable Organizing Training. Photo: 2004 Kristen Zimmerman.

general public. After eight years of the Bush Administration, a looming climate crisis, an economic crisis and political isolation, people are now ready for something very different, something hopeful. The Left and progressive organizers have the opportunity to lead this transformation. But, to do so, we must also transform ourselves.

The organizers in this report began their journeys many years ago. In the face of fragmentation and isolation, they began to seek a life in and out of the movement where they could be their whole selves, connected and interdependent. In a sense, they were ahead of the curve. As these organizers began

their individual journeys to heal themselves and re-imagine the movement, the process led them to ask fundamental questions about their core values and vision for the world. These questions moved them into unfamiliar territory and a much deeper exploration than they expected. They realized that in order to transform the world, they needed to make a commitment to transforming themselves and their movements. Each organizer was inspired to seek a transformative and sometimes overtly spiritual path.

Crisis is often the first step in these journeys. The present-day economic and environmental crises are prompting many organizers to take risks and open their hearts, minds and instincts to new ways of relating to the world. Crises within social justice organizations — conflicts among staff, board, members — while often very painful, have also helped some organizers heal and transform on the group level. Finally, personal crises like family dissolution and substance abuse have led some organizers to search for new kinds of self-awareness and community connection. At the heart of all of this, leaders are finding that a conscious and explicit commitment to individual transformation is often the first step to catalyzing organizational, movement and social transformation.

Movement leaders and organizers within the secular progressive movement are increasingly turning to transformative and spiritual practices to help them radically re-imagine social change. Collectively, they are generating a transformative approach to movement building that speaks to the needs and challenges of our time. Positioned at the heart of the social justice movement, frontline organizations have a unique perspective and crucial relationship to questions of social, political and spiritual transformation. Because of their unique role and because frontline organizations are often overlooked by funders and researchers, this report focuses explicitly and intentionally on their stories and lessons. Of course, the transformative work of frontline organizations is taking place alongside that of faith leaders and spiritual activists who offer a wealth

of wisdom, practice and history to this work. Frontline organizations are one important part of a much bigger evolution in our efforts to link social change with a spiritual path and inner transformation.¹

Leaders Coming “Out of the Spiritual Closet”

This report is the first in a series looking at how leaders and organizations are transforming the social justice movement by integrating transformative and spiritual practice. Throughout the series we will place a special emphasis on the role of frontline organizations and organizers. This report looks at the experience and insights of individual leaders as they “come out” of the “spiritual closet.” In the following sections, we propose a framework for understanding the levels of change encompassed by a more transformative movement building approach.

We then discuss:

- Where are we stuck? Organizers’ insights on how and why we have been limited as a movement.
- What is the new way? Organizers’ “coming out stories.”
- How do we move forward? The new way organizers are describing their work.

1. For more on the broader landscape of this field, see Appendix, page 49.

Frontline Organizations and Transformative Movement Building

MSC intentionally focuses this report and series on leaders who have been part of grassroots, frontline organizations. Frontline organizations are groups based in the needs and leadership of communities most impacted by social injustice. These communities and organizations are called “frontline” because they experience disproportionate impacts around issues such as education cuts, climate change, or welfare reform. These communities are most often communities of color and low income. While many of these groups have faith-based counterparts, the groups we focus on are secular. Frontline organizations have a major stake in questions of social, political and spiritual transformation, but they have often been excluded from the formal dialogue on spiritual or transformative organizing. By centralizing the experiences of frontline organizations we hope to make a much-needed contribution to conversations about movement building and social transformation.

Methodology and Scope

This paper is based on interviews conducted over a two-year period between March 2007 and March 2009. Earlier interviews took place in the Bay Area with grassroots community organizations working for racial and economic justice in communities of color. At the U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta, Georgia (June 2007), Movement Strategy Center's Spirit In Motion program facilitated a workshop titled, "Where's the Spirit in Organizing?" We experienced an outpouring of interest following this workshop and, as a result, decided to expand our interviews to those living outside the Bay Area (specifically, to New York, Boston, Albuquerque, Los Angeles, Miami and Durham.)

Most, but not all, of the organizers interviewed for this paper describe themselves as having a spiritual practice. For some, this was the first time they had had a conversation about spirituality, social justice and community organizing. Others had already articulated how they were basing their organizing models on the connection between spirit and social change.

There were two main groups of interviewees. The first were grassroots social justice organizers. These leaders work with youth, immigrants, queer and transgendered people, women, low-income workers and people of color. They work on many different issues from gentrification to reproductive justice, and all are strongly grounded in racial justice work. They range in age from mid-twenties to mid-sixties, with most between 28-40 years old encompassing diverse racial backgrounds, classes, genders and sexualities.

The second group of interviewees were teachers, trainers and consultants, all of whom have worked to bring healing, spirituality and sustainability to social justice organizations and individuals across the country. These individuals represented organizations such as stone circles (Mebane, NC), Rockwood Leadership Institute (Berkeley, CA), the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (Northampton, MA), Institute for Zen Studies (Honolulu, HI), and others. For the full list of interviewees, see OTSC Attributions in the appendices.

This paper is not exhaustive. We know that even with our best intentions to be diverse, not every perspective can be represented here. Our primary audience for this paper is "secular" nonprofit community organizations, a category into which most community organizing in the U.S. falls. This first paper focuses on the experiences of movement leaders and their reflections on the role of spiritual practice in their own transformation and movement work. Future papers will look at examples of organizations integrating group-level transformative practice into their organizing, leadership development, organizational structure and alliance building work.



Organizer and healer Shash Yazhi uses the medicine wheel to ground trainings and ceremonies with organizers.

Transformative Movement Building: MSC's Framework for Social Change

Movement Strategy Center uses the term transformative movement building as an umbrella to describe the diverse efforts of groups and individuals to fundamentally change our political, material, social and spiritual reality. Transformative movement building links the process of individual transformation to group and social transformation. In this framework, inner change and outer change are deeply connected. Transformative movement builders seek to synthesize wisdom and practice from spiritual traditions (often focused on deep inner transformation) with social change traditions of the Left (generally focused on social analysis and systems change). Transformative movement builders share a deep commitment to holistic individual, group and social change, driven by a connection to something larger than themselves.

As a practice, transformative movement building is still young and rapidly developing. With a few exceptions, organizers in the secular progressive and Left movements are just beginning to integrate transformative practices into their work at the organizational level.² Of course, while transformative work may be “new” to secular community organizing, many of the principles we describe here have existed in our communities and movements for a long time. Organizers have used spiritual traditions,

2. Some communities included in this report, particularly Indigenous communities, have more integrated, holistic worldviews that do not separate between community, spiritual path and social change that is such a dominant aspect of Western cultural approaches to social change. Progressive faith communities are part of the continuum of groups working to integrate values and vision into social change, but they are not part of the scope of this paper.



Organizers at a Movement Generation retreat.

culture and values to fight for social justice throughout history. Indigenous communities have never separated their justice-making from a sense of spirit and Creator. Many faith-based communities have developed community organizing projects that infuse their religious principles with action. While this report does not focus on these traditions, it honors them and opens the door to greater acknowledgment of their contributions in social justice work.

Transformative movement building has the potential to reshape the vision, values and practice of organizers and organizations. It holds promise for a long-range cultural shift in the progressive movement. MSC believes that this type of cultural shift happens through a dynamic process of transformation and change at multiple levels:

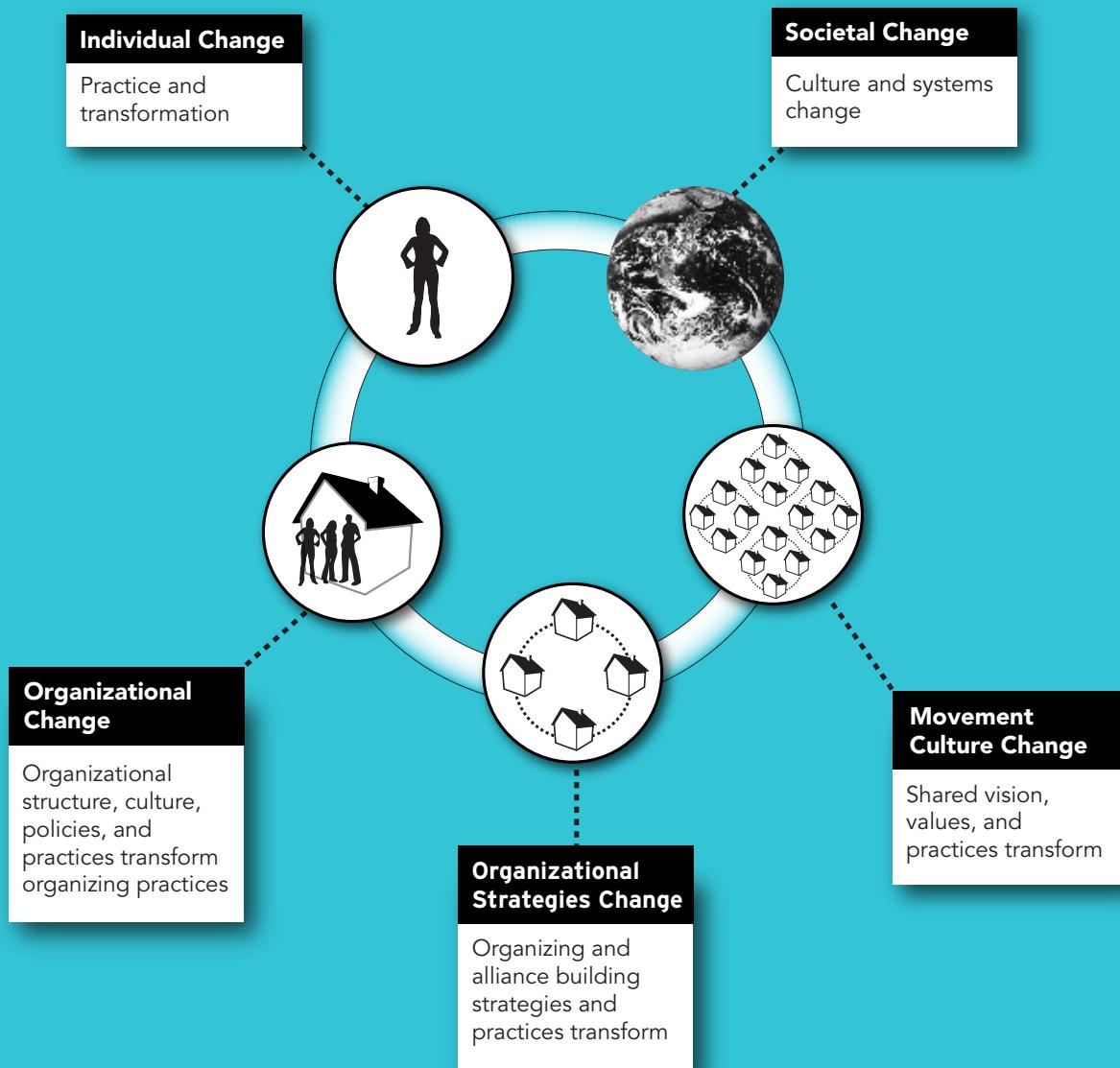
- **Individual transformation:** Transformative movement building provides a framework to support individuals to move from crisis to reflection and sustainable practice. Integrating spiritual and transformative practice into movement work can help develop more holistic leaders with a new approach to leadership, as well as individuals who are able to sustain their involvement in the movement over time.
- **Organizational transformation:** Transformative movement building provides a framework to support groups to move through crisis, learn through reflection and cultivate sustainable practices. By integrating transformative practice into movement organizations, organizers have a method for cultivating the qualities and capacities they need for interpersonal and group transformation. This, in turn, leads to healthier and more effective organizational communities that are better able to communicate, manage conflict, be self-aware and self-reflective, evolve and change. It also leads to changes in organizing models and social change practice as organizations reorient their goals and strategies to match the values they want to cultivate in the broader world, such as compassion, equity, love and non-violence.
- **Societal transformation:** Ultimately, transformative movement building provides a vehicle through which organizations can practice **pre-figurative politics** — the art of practicing the change you wish to see in the world. By integrating transformative and spiritual practice into movement work, organizers are able to intentionally visualize, practice and embody this change. As organizations begin to model healthier communities, they experiment with, and ultimately reflect, the more just world they are trying to create. Additionally, positive change in organizing culture enables these groups to attract members, win allies, convert opponents to allies and win policy and systems change that represents their long-term vision.

MSC has identified five steps in this process of cultural change (see diagram):

- Individual change
- Organizational change
- Organizing model and practice change
- Social impact and systems change
- Deep cultural change

MSC's Framework for Transformational Organizing

IMPACT: Individual • Organizational • Societal Transformation



How do organizers describe transformative movement building?

The organizers and spiritual teachers interviewed for this report used a range of words to describe the movement culture they seek (see below).

Transformative movement building refers to a wide range of practices, including contemplative practices like meditation, embodiment practices like martial arts, cultural ritual and healing practices, artistic and creative practices, and other forms of contemplative and spiritual practice.³

3. There has been strong work done in the field to catalogue the range of practices and approaches to transformational change (see Bibliography, page 31). Several frameworks outlining different approaches can be found in the Appendix.

Words interviewees used to describe this movement culture shift:



Performance poet and educator Glenis Redmond performs one of her original works at Deep Change. Photo: 2009 Willie Davis.

Where Are We Stuck?

Anyone who has spent time doing grassroots community organizing knows it's hard work. Community organizers must be recruiters, coaches, mentors, strategists and counselors all at the same time, and for ten to twelve hours a day. The work is unglamorous but rewarding. Nothing compares to the inspiration of watching someone who once barely spoke in meetings give a rousing public speech or seeing a fragmented community come together in a powerful march on City Hall. Strategizing in campaigns, building relationships, developing leaders, creating communities of resistance and celebrating our small victories together can keep someone in the work for a long time. And yet, too often, it is not enough. Our membership is too small, our wins too paltry and our messages too hard to understand. When the frustrations and long hours combine with personal crisis, organizers may seek guidance elsewhere or leave the work. Many of them look for new situations that feel more sustainable. Sometimes, they return to organizations that are still stuck in old ways and unwilling or unable to change.

The organizers and teachers interviewed for this report described patterns that are frustrating and damaging to our movement. These issues often lie at the root of our movement culture and the culture of our organizations.



"We have fear around what it would mean to change, to open up. To really stay in the present moment and see what's happening we need to have courage."

—Aparna Shah, formerly with Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice

1. Operating from a Sense of Urgency – Crisis Mode

"Everything is critical, nothing can wait," explained Jen Soriano, formerly with The Center for Media Justice. "There is a sense of urgency and anxiety about missed opportunities. This makes everything much more high stakes." Our tendency to barrel through long hours and intense meetings is exacerbated by the fact that the problems we face are urgent. Women are violently abused every day; youth are harassed by police every day; and people die from hunger, war and violence every day. These are enormous, complex problems that require equally complex responses. Yet, our work to produce research, policies and campaigns has not brought about the broad social change we seek. "People wear themselves out by just reacting, writing papers, attending meetings. They do a lot without making much occur, except to create outcomes for foundations," says Norma Wong of The Institute for Zen Studies.

Part of the problem lies in the nonprofit structure. Our movement structure is based on 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations, which are in turn based on corporate structures of governance designed to maintain hierarchy and ensure material productivity. Organizations are forced to produce deliverables to win funding. Often, these deliverables are short-term, taking us away from the more urgent, less measurable outcomes our communities need.

Not surprisingly, overworking is common in nonprofits. People believe they need to work 24/7 to meet their deliverables and be productive. At the same time, overwork can also be a coping mechanism that helps us feel important and escape the enormity of the problems we are trying to address. How many of us could spend two days completely unstructured? Ten days? One month? Being alone and not busy, we are faced with the thoughts and emotions our hectic days help us keep at bay. In order to avoid the gravity of the problems we face, we often just keep working.

Current models of organizing also contribute to the problem. Problem-focused and reactionary, our organizing falls short of addressing global problems of war, imperialism, finance capital and climate crisis. Our organizing often responds to attacks, letting others set the agenda, rather than cultivating the capacity to see the bigger picture and work from a place of vision. Moreover, we tend to take a highly polarized us-versus-them stance, isolating our movement from potential allies and partners. This ultimately decreases our influence and power. Rather than running faster in place, now might be the time for deeper reflection. Like Gandhi did after returning to India from South Africa, we might have to sit in a quiet place and wait for an answer to come. It might be the most intelligent and strategic thing to do.

2. Embodying the Dominant Culture

"We all hate on each other at some level."

—Jermaine Ashley,
Oakland Kids First

We live in an individualistic society full of anger, greed and violence. It is absurd to think that people working for social change have been spared these messages. "Hatred, division and separation get internalized in us," maintains Claudia Horwitz of stone circles. "We see it so much that we take it in and manifest it in our

organizations and collaborations. Everything stems from our inability to live in connectivity. There is competitiveness with people who respect and like each other. We have turf battles with people we share values with. We aren't abundant in our thinking and feeling."

The in-fighting that exists within the social justice movement causes extreme suffering and makes us doubt our ability to govern and lead. If we can't get along with people who basically agree with us, how can we lead a nation to embrace social justice and revolution? Instead of offering solutions and vision, we often become very skilled at criticism. While healthy feedback is important, the culture of critique that we have allowed to flourish has not brought us closer to building mass movement. Instead, it has resulted in clique-ish, judgmental behavior that tears people down instead of building them up. We use the same combative principles we learned in community organizing 101, but we turn them against our co-workers, supervisors and comrades. Ironically, we are emulating the very culture we are trying to change. Through our actions we deter others outside the movement from supporting and joining us. In the end, this leaves all sides discouraged, exhausted and hopeless.

To counter greed, we need a sense of abundance. To counter fear, we need hope. To counter violence, we need peace. All too often, our movement uses the old mainstays of competition, isolation and division to get funding, brand our organizations and structure our internal management.

3. Recycling Trauma

Many of us come into this work because we, or the people we love, have experienced deep injustice. Sometimes the injustice is interpersonal, but most often it is part of the collective trauma our communities experience through systemic violence, racism, sexism and poverty. This intimate knowledge of injustice can be one of our biggest assets and one of our biggest challenges. While these experiences give us deep insight and conviction, they also reinforce trauma. If our wounds have not healed, trauma can severely limit our ability to be present with each other.

Without awareness, we recycle trauma and create new wounds within the movement. "There are so many elders in the work that don't work together anymore," said Adriann Barboa from Young Women United in Albuquerque, New Mexico. "We have to know how to heal and bring ourselves back through our differences." Healing from past movement scars is just one of the wounds we need to care for. "We are in a lot of pain and we carry that into the movement," said Ai-jen Poo of Domestic Workers United. "The movement culture we have reflects our broader



Organizers Michelle Ferrer and John Scott participate in a journaling activity at MSC's Sustainable Organizer Training. Photo: 2004 Kristen Zimmerman.

culture. It's a place that doesn't create the safety and space needed to heal."

Mordecai Ettinger is a movement worker interested in the impacts of trauma on people and communities working for justice. "Trauma impacts our ability to connect. It creates a global phenomenon of disassociation. In Marxism, the term is alienation," says Ettinger describing the impact of systems like racism, sexism and homophobia on our lives. "When we are disconnected, we don't know how we are impacting others or how we're being impacted." Ettinger believes the optimal state for our emotional and physical body is "flexible, open and non-defensive, with a larger capacity for conflict and disagreement that allows us to hold intense emotion and be in solidarity." These are all the things required to work together well and build movement. When we disconnect from our trauma, however, we remain closed, inflexible and defensive, unable to deal with conflict in a good way and unable to hold intense emotion.

As a result of trauma we often seek out and stay in spaces that feel familiar. For many in our movement, that can even mean surrounding ourselves with people who think and believe the same things we do. Ultimately, this means our movement circles become narrower. "People have been hurt," said Jermaine Ashley who describes himself as a gospel rapper and organizer for youth of color in Oakland. "We need healing, we need emotional maturity and we need to build relationships with folks who aren't like us."

Healing from trauma requires reconnecting with our bodies and what we care most about. "We need to rehumanize each other," said Ettinger. "This requires a value shift on the Left. We have to deal with the emotional intolerance in our movement."

4. Attachment to Anger and Struggle

Mainstream culture often feeds on our anger, greed and competitiveness. In order to succeed in creating a loving world we need to find new ways to positively embody our values. Organizers are taught to agitate using people's anger and express it in our campaigns. The dominant model of organizing embraces conflict, eternal war and sees anger as essential to our success. While feeling the full extent of our anger against oppressive systems is an important part of becoming politicized, stopping there can be detrimental to our emotional and physical health. "The dominant emotion I associate with organizing is anger," said Jidan Koon of Serve the People. "At a certain point the anger that infuses organizing can get tiring. You get to a point where you say, 'So



Sonali Sadequee in a small group discussion at the Deep Change gathering. Photo: 2009 Willie Davis.

"We're becoming much more angry. At times, I don't see the difference between us and the forces we claim to fight against."

— Rose Sackey-Milligan,
formerly with Center for the
Contemplative Mind in
Society

what else?' And that's what gets to proactive visioning." It is hard to live the values of love and community when we spend most of our time being angry. We need to find new ways to positively embody our values.

Similarly, we cannot only base our work on struggling against something. "Struggle has become a rite of passage in this movement. It's become the way we do things," explained independent consultant Lisa Garrett. Our movement culture uses struggle as a word to define itself. We are always struggling against something. The term itself connotes hardship and extreme exertion. While this definitely describes a portion of our work in this movement, it is not and should not be the entirety of it. "We are more than just struggle," said Garrett.

Without the ability to manage and use our anger constructively we endanger our emotional and physical health. We need to learn to put anger in its place by learning to experience it and use it without being controlled by it. When we do this we are poised to make wiser decisions and to lead from a proactive rather than a reactive stance.

5. Maintaining an Exclusive – and Narrow – Movement

"In the end, people want to feel safe, loved and part of something," said Ai-jen Poo. "But right now we lack the ability to make people feel the movement encompasses them."

Over the past few decades, community organizers have struggled to bring our work "to scale." We have been unable to engage the large numbers of people necessary to effect real change, even when our work addresses the real problems impacting their lives. Our inability to create spaces that feel good for people may be a big part of the problem. Too often, social justice leadership styles have been forceful and combative, not only with targets but also with our own co-workers and members. This kind of leadership alienates our allies, burns out our leaders and weakens our organizations. Leadership has focused primarily on getting things done, not on how it feels to be part of an organization. In fact, people who focus on emotions are often perceived as soft and irrelevant to the

"real" work. By focusing narrowly on the intellectual and pragmatic aspects of social justice work, we forget that a movement can only be successful when people have genuine relationships in which they feel valued and empowered.

Our movement culture has set the bar high for admission. Newcomers often feel they have to prove themselves and how "down" they are with the struggle before others will

"You can't get very far on just anger."

—Maria Poblet, St. Peter's
Housing Committee

work with them or take them seriously. Our movement also idealizes martyrdom and sacrificing one's life for the cause. Organizers often feel they can never do enough, no matter how hard they are working. Not surprisingly then, we end up alienating people with our judgmental and angry atmosphere, repelling them or pushing them out of the movement. Everyday, people decide they need to leave the movement to care for their families, go back to school or change careers.

We make our movement, and ourselves, small through this kind of behavior. Rather than opening our doors wide for all to enter, we close ourselves off from the world, making ourselves less relevant and more elitist. Communities with the most urgent need for movement building do not see the movement as a place for them. If, instead, we bring our whole selves to this work, our potential to grow as a movement becomes boundless. By developing our ability to embrace difference, meet people where they are at, forgive past mistakes and progress forward with unity and strength we will find people drawn to work with us.

6. Ambivalence with Power

As a movement concerned with transforming power, we have a remarkable inability to hold, share and even change power. This ambivalence with power has consequences in our relationship to the broader society, within the movement itself and within movement organizations.

In our movement work we rarely imagine ourselves as the power holders. This ambivalence is rooted in and reinforced by our movement self-image as "the underdogs" of society. This dynamic is also reflected in our relationships with targets, where we have created a rigid dichotomy of good versus evil. To be on the side of justice and good we position ourselves as watchdogs rather than decision makers. While watchdogs are important, their role is to react not to lead or govern. By over identifying with resistance and under identifying with governance,

we lose opportunities to transform power, prepare for leadership and advance proactive solutions. Instead, we remain outsiders. If we are serious about transforming the world, we will need to build our capacity to lead as well as to resist and critique. In doing so, we can practice models of leadership that reflect our values of justice, equity and sustainability for all people.

Participants (Vanessa Daniel and Lisa Russ) engage in a theater of the oppressed activity during MSC's Sustainable Organizer Training. Photo: 2004 Kristen Zimmerman.



Our ambivalence with power is also reflected inside movement organizations and our relationships to each other. In the nonprofit sector leaders often vacillate between process



Organizers at a Movement Generation retreat.

paralysis (avoiding decision making by leaving it to the group) and dictatorship (making self-centered decisions without the needed insights and opinions of the group). Movement leaders often do not know how to handle the unequal power relationships we find between organizations, communities and individuals. Rather than working with issues of power and access directly, we let power divide and stall us. This has huge consequences at the organizational level and in our ability to form the broad, powerful alliances we need to make change. While oppressive forces are a reality for us, we sometimes slip into victim mentality, always looking outside for help and reparations, rather than building on the power and strength we have within our communities and ourselves. Furthermore, in our focus on systemic problems, we may fail to question our own actions, behaviors and attitudes. This can lead us to ignore opportunities for the change and growth.

Developing collective structures that are effective, efficient and fast moving when needed is a tough challenge. But ultimately, committing to value-driven governance gives us the practice we need to make real change. By confronting our ambivalence with power, we have the opportunity to transform our movements, organizations and leaders.

Coming Out: Stories from the Trenches

Despite the often-unhealthy practices within our movements, many individuals have taken it upon themselves to heal their minds, bodies and spirits and live differently. Frequently, this "choice" is born of a physical, mental, emotional or spiritual breakdown.

When Rose Sackey-Milligan directed the Social Justice Program at the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society in Northampton, Massachusetts, she led contemplative retreats for activists and organizers. "Unfortunately, most people entered our retreats out of a sense of self preservation and survival. They were worried about sustaining their life so that they didn't die or fall into an abyss of suffering. They wanted to be around to do this important work."

After these individuals begin to experience spirituality or discover a new way of being, they can go on to change the organizations they are part of, inspire others to heal and change their understanding of the work. While the relationship between individual healing and collective healing is not linear, the impacts are profound. "This is how all living systems change," said Ettinger. "We impact the people in our lives and the people we work with."

Jidan's Story

Jidan Koon started organizing in Berkeley, California, when she was in high school. Her parents were movement leaders in the Bay Area and she inherited her parents' passion for justice and organizing. She attended the University of California at Berkeley where she fought to save the ethnic studies department and against state propositions that ended affirmative action and bilingual education in California. In her twenties she had a seemingly unending capacity for work. She was inspired by the knowledge of history and the sense of possibility that her parents passed down to her. "Movement building is not a pipe dream," asserts Koon. "There are real wins that people have seen over generations. It's happening in other parts of the world. It's do-able."

Like so many movement builders, ten years of organizing and activism led Koon to burn out. The work that used to give her energy made her tired. She felt guilty and over-privileged if she rested. Everything felt urgent. Work had become an escape from reflecting on her life and the movement.



When Koon turned 30, she looked around at her life. She realized she could not keep going the way she was. Her personal life was falling apart. She felt emotionally out of touch with her partner. She felt no sense of identity outside of her work. She didn't know what to do.

Interestingly, the answers started coming when Koon reflected on her year as a church-based organizer just after she graduated from college. That year she spent almost every single Sunday in many different kinds of churches. In church she felt an immediate presence of something larger than herself. However, because she had grown up in an atheist family, she thought of her organizing in terms of social justice not spirituality. "I realized," recalls Koon, "that this is what I had been looking for." Soon after, she began to meditate in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, eventually going on to form and host a sangha (meditation community) for people of color interested in movement work.

Today, she looks back on her past with compassion and balance. "Social justice people have this martyr thing going on," she observes. "We see how messed up things are and it's hard to draw boundaries." Koon now maintains a spiritual practice that includes meditation, journal writing and art making. "My practice is about being expressive in a consistent way. It's about getting in touch with myself and being mindful."

Meditation and Buddhism have nurtured Koon's ability to experience what "freedom feels like." In the past, she thought of freedom as the "promised land, like a utopia" that was far into the future. Through meditation, Koon no longer focuses on a mythical future, but holds that reality in the present. "Meditation gave me a taste of liberation in the present," she asserts. "Now I know what I'm talking about when I talk about freedom."

The impact of this freedom is enormous. She believes it has helped her notice how much judgment she cast in her life, how much she walked around reacting to others and external situations instead of being grounded in herself. "I now have a different relationship to guilt. I can now work better with different kinds of people and be more compassionate. I have more space to be me; I am more compassionate with myself." She also feels a deeper understanding of current conditions, as well as an expanded understanding of movement building. "Now I can see more clearly what is winnable. And, I can see the worth in working across political difference and meeting others where there are at. I can have conversations about politics without making other people feel wrong or less advanced."

Koon is putting her newfound insights into practice, helping to develop new organizational forms outside the nonprofit structure. She helped start Serve The People (STP), an organizing project for Southeast Asian youth in Oakland. "It is important that we are reaching out to unorganized groups and providing a space that incorporates culture and spirituality," maintains Koon. At STP meetings, there is always an altar. "We created an altar to reflect our culture, our families and our ancestors. Now, that's where we start every meeting. It helps us stay grounded in our culture." Serve the People also integrates other practices including healing circles, qi gong and meditation into their work.

Koon is excited to create more spaces for people to genuinely connect with one another. "There needs to be more relationship building with the broader community," she maintains. "We need to stop separating movement people out from our larger communities. We have to get to the root of why we

do unhealthy things and identify ways to heal. In my case, I was a workaholic afraid to stop. For others, healing is about other things. Spiritual transformation is an individual thing. Movement building should be the place where structural fights and personal transformation meet."



Kathy Sanchez from Tewa Women United at the Deep Change gathering. Photo: 2009 Willie Davis.

Kathy's Story

Kathy Sanchez was 9 years old the first time she encountered ancestral dream-space, a way to pray through one's dreams, which is a tradition in the Pueblos of northern New Mexico where she lived. At the time she felt deeply lost and in need of support. Violence against women and girls was widespread in her community, and women had not yet found the power or voice to change these conditions. Leadership, inside and outside of her tribal lands often rewarded men's unaccountable attitudes and behavior toward women.

The violence in Sanchez's community stemmed from colonization and the related trauma of oppression and poverty. Over time these forces had pushed most of the tribe's spiritual and healing practices underground. The culture of violence fractured her community creating painful divisions and dualities — male versus female, native versus western, spiritual versus material. Women were no longer permitted to be wisdom carriers by tapping their connection to life and the mother of all life, Mother Earth.

Dysfunction in Sanchez's immediate family meant she sought safety at her grandparents' and auntie's homes. In their homes she began to learn how to use her ancestral connectedness through the dream-space, Tewa language and in the "asking" — known to others as prayer — as a way to access spirit and find guidance.

"Staying with my elders shaped me," she recalls. "They would pray in their language [Tewa], asking different realms for support, giving over their thoughts and questions. Praying was done throughout the day. This was really important and central to my spiritual rootedness. When things got crazy in the American context I still had my thoughts and prayers in Tewa."

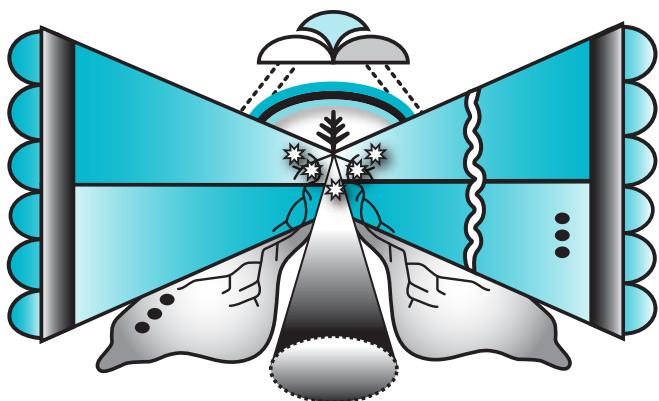
Sanchez longed for a new reality for herself, other girls and the people in her tribe. Dream-space offered her an accessible spiritual practice to guide her search.

Over the next decade, Sanchez poured herself into her studies. With her auntie's support she went to college and then graduate school as a young mother. In graduate school she studied education and worked to increase the number of Native teachers. When Sanchez's professor asked her to lead a conversation with other educators on how to better support and retain

Native students she turned to dream-space again for guidance. "Only in asking for internal guidance," she knew, "will thoughts create reality."

That night she had a dream that would shape and guide the rest of her life. She dreamt of a butterfly with one wing representing Native culture and "knowingness" and the other wing representing Western culture and "knowledge." Instead of conflict, the butterfly embodied and lived in these two

worlds harmoniously. The butterfly model became a spiritual philosophy that would help Sanchez transcend and heal the divisions that fragmented Native women's lives. The dream gave her the visual and narrative tools to communicate this vision to her professors and other students and to guide the process as it moved forward.



the culture of violence that had shattered their lives. The idea for Tewa Women United began to take shape. Sanchez emerged as a bridge-builder in the group and used the butterfly model in later years to translate the vision, values and dreams of the women into a nonprofit legal structure.

Tewa Women United (TWU) soon began to play a transformative role in the community, first among women within the support group, then beyond. Rather than framing their work as women's equality, however, they spoke to the deep need of all community members, men and women, to heal and belong: "We say equality is the support of each other — men and women, inner [Native] communities and outer [non-Native] communities — so all can recover."

This stance helped TWU uproot a pattern of cultural violence where people attack others in order to feel self-esteem. In doing so, TWU helped people become a positive force in the community. Sanchez's sense of "spirit-rootedness" helps her and others at TWU find the humanity in all people, even in those causing harm.

"Most people don't see transformation as a process and path," she explains. "They see it as an end. You can talk about dismantling racism, but if don't go into how you will transform the beings who are racist, you will not have transformation. If you focus on cultural violence, but are not doing the deep cultural work to transform the community, it will remain."

Ultimately, Sanchez believes real transformation requires hard work and a deep commitment to interconnectedness. By trying to live according to the butterfly model, Sanchez has modeled a path for

healing and spirit-rootedness in her community. Pueblo women now have a framework to see themselves and be seen as natural leaders. And, there is a concerted movement to form networks and collaborations to address and heal from intimate, cultural and systemic violence in their northern New Mexico communities.

Rose's Story



Rose Sackey-Milligan talks with Akaya Windwood. Photo: 2009 Willie Davis.

Rose Sackey-Milligan became politically conscious when she was 16, during the period of decolonization in Africa and the Caribbean, and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. The first ten years of her political activity were marked by a pervasive hope that change could happen. She was inspired by the period's powerful grassroots organizing led by people of color. Individuals could and did find a sense of power through the possibility that revolutionary change was right around the corner. "I really believed it would happen at the time," she recalls.

When revolutionary change did not occur and, instead, the government targeted revolutionary groups through destructive, covert mechanisms like COINTEL-Pro, Sackey-Milligan began to lose hope. She had been taught that the path toward transformation should focus on political education, strategy and citizen empowerment. She began to understand that these strategies alone would not be sufficient to make significant changes. "I began to get burnt out, tired and dispassionate. And, that is when I began to think that a different kind of change was required."

Sackey-Milligan searched for something deeper. "I didn't call it spiritual at the time," she said. "But, something was happening inside me that I needed to address." Sackey-Milligan thought that if she found what she was looking for outside the movement, she could re-enter political work with more focus and awareness. What she found was far more than awareness.

Sackey-Milligan spent a long time exploring and discovering a path that could lead to health, wholeness and joy. She realized that the level of rage she carried about injustice kept her trapped. "I had to release a lot of these negative energies," she said. "I needed to embrace the values of compassion." Sackey-Milligan realized how empty this rage left her. "I longed to fill this vacuum in my heart and soul. I felt I was barely surviving and not really living." She soon realized spirituality was the missing component.

Sackey-Milligan found it hard to find groups of people with whom she could share her ideas of faith and action. Her peers in political struggle did not support her and considered her "wimpy."

They wanted to talk about organizing campaigns and were not interested in thinking about different ideas, actions or strategies. "I felt isolated," she remembers.

Today, Sackey-Milligan's spiritual practice includes a strong yoga practice, a mindful meditative practice and an African traditional religion derived from the Yorùbá people in Nigeria, West Africa. She relates that these three practices "ground me and keep me whole." She is able to relate and engage to different communities including cultures she finds extremely oppressive and difficult to bear.

Sackey-Milligan formerly directed the Social Justice Program at the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society located in Northampton, Massachusetts. There she focused on creating space for other activists and organizers to find health, centeredness and well being. She currently serves as co-director (with Raúl Quiñones Rosado) of c-Integral based in Puerto Rico. "Political struggle is not separate from the individual," she said. "The path of spirit is the path of becoming a better, more aligned human being." Sackey-Milligan is excited about the heightened interest movement activists have in combining spiritual practice with political work. "We didn't have the awareness that I see now during the period of worldwide African liberation during the 1960s. It feels like youth are learning from the mistakes of older generations about how we treat the Earth and interact in community. It feels like we are returning to traditional ideas of community love, support and care. Consciousness is evolving; I am in awe."

"During the Civil Rights Movement we didn't have the awareness that I see now. It feels like youth are learning from the mistakes of older generations about how we treat the Earth and interact in community. It feels like we are returning to traditional ideas of community love, support and care. Consciousness is evolving; I am in awe."

Mateo's Story

Mateo Nube grew up in Bolivia and moved to the U.S. in the 1990s to attend the University of California at Berkeley. Although Mateo grew up in a military dictatorship, he got his passion for justice from his mother who was a Leftist in the 1960s and 70s. Looking back, Mateo believes that his early commitment to revolution was a form of religion. "My heaven became entering the plaza with red flags. It was like the Evangelicals waiting for rapture, except I was waiting for revolution. It was revolutionary rapture."

As Mateo grew older, he became deeply confused as he witnessed the U.S. and other powers crush Central American revolutions and learned about the serious contradictions within revolutionary movements. "When the Soviet Bloc collapsed, I realized my picture-book revolution was a lot less probable. I also realized that marching into the plaza wasn't the end; it was the beginning. That is when the real work started." This realization hit Nube hard. "I felt politically lost and very discouraged." Nube felt he had put "all his eggs in one basket" and now had to figure out whether his "God" even existed.

Nube began organizing and popular education work in college and later in unions. What drew his interest most was the theory and work of popular education. Early on, Nube felt pressure to subsume the less political aspects of his life for the struggle. "Everything from art, family, sports, relaxation and friendship received less value," he recalls. "Fundamentally, this narrowness contradicts the world we are trying to create."

Today, Nube doesn't see himself as someone with a spiritual practice. Yet, he has become more open to ritual, gratitude and "acknowledging the intrinsic beauty of being alive." He explains, "I feel like I've been a spiritual person my whole life. I just wasn't comfortable using that term."

Nube's current practice of regular gardening serves as a spiritual space for him. Every morning, he spends time in the garden before his family awakens. "There is something about connecting to the core — the sun, soil and water — that gives me a spiritual boost," he explains. "I like the exploration of growing food, touching the soil, and relating to plants and insects."

Nube's spirituality has helped him rethink standard notions of movement building. "We have to move away from Western frames of thinking and understand our material and immaterial needs," said Nube. He is bringing this new perspective to his role as the director of The Movement Generation Justice & Ecology Project, an organization engaging economic and racial justice organizers in work around ecology and climate change. "My new spiritual conception of being alive has helped me to understand the Earth and nature in its wisdom, limits and needs. We as humans have the opportunity to live symbiotically with nature, but that will require a huge transformation in all of us. We have to understand once again the sacredness of the land."

Nube's spiritual understanding has also helped him find patience to pause, digest and understand what movement building really means. "Before, I didn't have the ability to think about social change over the long arch of time. Now, I am challenging my desire for immediate satisfaction and transformative change. I can, instead, take a breath and think about how to do this

work in a more strategic way. I can create liberated spaces and organizations that inspire transformation. I have a humbled conception that I am small and life is large. This gives me more space and room to move."

Mateo Nube at a Movement Generation retreat.





“We need to be rooted in the politics of transformation. People can come into the space and learn tools around being sustainable. But the end goal is transformation.”

— Mia Herndon, Third Wave Foundation

Early morning Tai Ji (or “Tai Chi”) practice at Deep Change. 2009 Willie Davis.

The New Way

Many of us have the openness, desire and skills to change the way we do things in our movement. The political moment begs us to rise to the occasion and do something different. But what values are we actually practicing? What are we working toward? What is our vision for an effective movement and how can we get there?

The organizers interviewed for this report shared their ideas for what this “new way” looks like; it is one that centralizes the core values of interconnectedness, sustainability and justice. At the heart of their insight is the recognition that for change to happen, we must change also. This means we need to learn to listen to our hearts, our guts and each other in a new way. “Unless we let go of our intellectual approach and standard script and use our centeredness, inner knowing or spiritual wisdom,” argues Gihan Perera, “I don’t think we will make it.”

In the course of our interviews, several important themes emerged that help define the “new way” that is emerging:

1. Integrating Individual and Group Transformation

As people we are both individuals and members of families, communities and society at large. Yet, as organizers, many of us were taught that individual transformation and healing are separate from, and less important than, group and systemic change. Long-term social transformation ultimately depends on lots and lots of people shifting their beliefs, values and ways of being. As we wrestle with how to be our full selves in the movement, and how to engage everyday people in the struggle for social change, many of us are learning we have to integrate individual transformation with group transformation.

“The nature of transformation is that it does not happen in the absence of absolute change. It includes you.”

— Norma Wong,
Institute for Zen Studies

"It's inspiring to vision because we are never supposed to do that."

— Spenta Kandawalla,
social justice organizer
and healer

This includes our own transformation as leaders, the transformation of our members and the transformation of those we are trying to reach and organize. Ultimately, this requires risk and an openness to grow through the process.

2. Big Visioning and Reclaiming Values

Where are we headed? What kind of society do we want to see? When we vision what we want our communities and movements to look like, we tap into a sense of imagination, creativity and hope. Our current movements rarely encourage us to think big this way. Instead, we focus on small and short-term struggles and the frenetic pace needed to accomplish our tasks. Our ability to vision has atrophied, a direct result of living in a world that requires us, in fact demands us, not to imagine.

Taking the time to vision with depth and attention to detail is an important task for our movement. What would an alternative economic system look like? How does a gift economy function? What do cooperative housing experiments tell us about collective housing models? How can we hold people accountable without criminalizing them? How participatory does democracy need to be to be relevant and engaging, and yet functional?

What is most important about visioning a new way is that the answers we unearth can inform our present-day organizational work. We will start to re-evaluate and refine what we are working toward and build a greater understanding of what we are fighting for, thereby giving new meaning and context to the short-term campaigns we wage.

In our visioning process, we should remain open and unencumbered by what came before us. It's true that we should build on the work revolutionaries and progressive leaders have accomplished in other parts of the world and in other time periods, but we should not let their work shut down our own creative processes. Further, our vision should include everyone, not just those we work with directly. How will new zoning laws or land-use policies impact middle-class communities of color? How will white working-class communities be impacted by new educational policies and affirmative action? Understanding our interconnectedness means including all living things in our vision for liberation. We cannot be free unless we are all free.

3. Centralizing and Investing in Relationships and Community

Movements are about moving people. Fundamentally they are about the relationships and the connections we build with each other. The need to be connected and belong is a basic part of our shared and evolutionary history. As organizers we need to understand and work with this truth of human nature.

angel Kyodo Williams and Adrienne Maree Brown connecting at Deep Change. Photo: 2009 Willie Davis.

In order to make fundamental changes in our society, we need the love and friendship of others. Developing nurturing collective spaces is arguably one of our most important tasks right now. It will be these relationships that allow us to collectively heal and move into new ways of being. It will be this community that allows us to take risks, imagine, vision and fight for what we believe.

Not only does this type of community need to develop within our mass-based organizing groups, it has to develop between movement leaders and all those who see themselves as part of a movement for social change. "People want community and deep connection," says Malachi Larrabee-Garza of The Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY). "We need to be building community and not building fights." When we can't work with others, we unnecessarily fragment the movement, making it harder to achieve our goals. Our greatest resource is the potential found in our relationships with each other and the change we can make through our collective power.

4. Evolving Our Understanding of Power

When we think of our targets, most often we think about people who are not like us. They do not understand our communities, they do not care about our interests and they do not want us to be effective or successful. Some organizing models teach us to shame our targets into yielding to our demands. In effect, we make our targets the "other," putting them on the defensive from the start and trying to force them to do what we want. This leaves us little room to build relationships. Also, it requires an enormous amount of effort to engage in relationships that involve extreme conflict and combativeness. It drains our energy, uses our resources inefficiently and does not help us transform the us-versus-them culture that permeates our society.

What is most perplexing about this scenario is that most of our targets are civil servants; often they are people who have taken public office for the "greater good." City council members, county supervisors, school board officials, mayors and even small business owners often have more in common with us and our constituencies than they do with the owning/ruling class. They rarely are people who directly benefit



"If we are going to create any meaningful change, we must model new relationships to ourselves and the world around us."

—Ai-jen Poo, Domestic Workers United

from war-profiteering or rising oil and gas prices. Some of these people often grew up in the same communities we work with and have struggled hard to get a good paying government job or give back to their communities.

In many cases, it would be more strategic to use our power to reveal our commonalities instead of our differences. This does not mean we engage in relationships where we compromise our values or fail to hold targets accountable; it means engaging in real relationship building with targets and developing ways to hold them accountable without demonizing them. We must help them (and our communities) to better act with love and compassion.

Having a deeper understanding of power and acknowledging the power that comes from spiritual practice and personal challenges can also increase our relevance to the communities we work with. We rarely use power-mapping techniques that include the power we get from within. This intellectual approach to landscaping power can unintentionally disempower our organizations and communities. While it's hard to quantify spiritual or emotional power, leaving it out of the overall picture leaves little room for us to imagine ourselves as powerful. When we stay stuck in a victim role and don't think of ourselves as powerful and victorious, we limit our ability to transform — ourselves or the world.

Claiming our power goes further than just our power-mapping tools and campaign strategies. We also need to claim our power through our actions in everyday situations. Working from a powerful place can impact how we interact with landlords, teachers, co-workers, supervisors and members. We often think

of claiming power within the context of our interactions with targets or decision makers and less about our day-to-day interactions with each other. We also tend to think about a show of power as being loud, strident and unyielding. Often, we are more powerful when we are calm, centered and present. From this place, we can tap into our own power, a sense of something bigger than ourselves, and make decisions out of wisdom instead of raw emotion.

“The system creates enemies, opposition and social conflict, of course, but we can’t be prescriptive about it. We have to complicate the picture instead of oversimplifying it. The power mapping we do is just not complex enough.”

— Jason Negrón-Gonzales,
Movement Generation Justice &
Ecology Project

"It's still a struggle, but I see the worth in working across different political analysis and meeting people where they are at."

— Jidan Koon, Serve the People



5. Expanding Our Idea of Useful Work

We need all types of work in our movement to make it successful. We need organizers, strategists, teachers, artists, farmers, nurses, engineers, scientists and politicians. Our goal is not to make everyone into a professional organizer, but to create a movement that is relevant, attractive and accessible to all kinds of people.

Recently, at a workshop, a facilitator asked the group to divide into four categories depending on where they saw themselves. The four categories were: warrior (people who

primarily see their role in this world to fight, protect and pave new paths); toolmaker (people who primarily see their role as designing, creating and building new 'tools' for the community to use); elders (people who carry wisdom, resolve disputes, honor ancestors and officiate rituals); and homemakers (people who primarily see their role as teaching, feeding, taking care of children and tending the home). Most of the group moved into the warrior or toolmaker corners; very few moved to the elder or homemaker corners. Our facilitator asked us to look around and see what our community looked liked. In that room our movement looked very lop-sided, with a large corner full of warriors, a small number of toolmakers and educators, and few elders and home makers.

In order to build a more balanced movement, we need to deepen our discussions, engagement and relationships with all types of people. We have to create movement infrastructure that supports people in all aspects of their life, especially as we age and change roles. Our movement can't just be for full-time nonprofit workers. And we can't isolate ourselves and our movement.

We have to work across political differences, moving people to the Left as we engage with them and allowing ourselves to be moved, opened and educated as well. It does not serve us to be marginalized or fringe. We have to reach out, honoring the contributions all people make to the whole. This does not mean watering down the politics. Rather, it means watering the politics with the richness of diversity and an openness to change. It means engaging in debate and discussion without having pre-conceived notions of the political importance or legitimacy others could bring. It means allowing ourselves to be opened and moved by our interactions thereby creating room for others' opinions, thoughts, ideas and experiences to have lasting impact.

Cindy Weisner carves a pair of chopsticks at the Deep Change gathering. Photo: 2009 Willie Davis.

"Different points in time require different things. We have a tendency to hold on to what we know. This dogma weighs down social movement and prevents people who are not in it from joining. If you are fixed on an idea, you are not able to make change."

— Norma Wong, Institute for Zen Studies



6. Building Alignment and Synergy

There are different ways to make change. You can use what the system uses to maintain its power: force, lies and crumbs. Or we can use something deeper than this system's enforced fear, ignorance and shame. We can direct our hope, inspiration and excitement in ways that make us more than just the sum of our parts. Alignment requires synergy and gives rise to momentum, which facilitates movement. All of these are essential ingredients for organizing. Yet, organizers often lack strategies for generating alignment within groups.

The most successful social movements have been able to move large numbers of people to action to achieve structural and cultural change on a large scale. This requires alignment and deep relationships between a diverse range of communities and an understanding of how we can use different approaches simultaneously to make the change we want to see. In this way, social movements unite people through shared strategy, shared principles and shared goals.

You can recognize alignment within groups by the ease with which decisions are made and communication occurs. It is easy to feel when it is present, and equally easy to feel in its absence. When a group is unaligned, decisions take a long time, communication is often misunderstood and time is used

ineffectively. "When you start paying attention to the energy in the room, you get more attuned to what's happening on an energetic level," said Bill Aal of Tools for Change. "We should be training organizers to be more aware and more able to transform that energy."

"When people get on to something, you can feel it. People's juices start flowing and there is energetic alignment. It gets in the body and reaches into the person's reason for being there."

— Viveka Chen, San Francisco Buddhist Center

Being able to transform energy and align groups can make the work of organizing effortless. Creating alignment requires leaders to adopt a heightened awareness of the present moment, invest significant time in personal relationships and engage in alignment practices with the group. Mindfulness and meditative practices can help sharpen the awareness of the mind. Activities like music, drumming and other rhythmic activity can draw attention to what alignment already exists. In

"The greatest movement need is to do things differently. We need to be more reflective and ask ourselves what we need. They way things are done now is at a huge cost to individuals."

— Jesus Solorio, California Tomorrow

"Integrating spirit and healing into the movement would be a big step towards creating a real movement."

— Jen Soriano, formerly of Center for Media Justice

the same way that football players take ballet classes to become more flexible and graceful, engaging in group practices like martial arts, music and art can help staff within organizations become more aware of and aligned with each other. Ultimately, this helps people work better as a team.

7. Cultivating Patience and Reflection

The enormity of the task at hand requires us to be thoughtful about our responses. Instead of doing a lot, we should try to get a lot from the work we do. "More bang for our buck" would be the capitalist version. To accomplish this, we must slow down and ask ourselves the questions: Why am I doing this? What kind of change do I want to bring about in this world? What do I need to do to make this change occur?

We must stop and assess our strengths and challenges as a movement before busying ourselves with the hard day-to-day work of community organizing. We need to be able to admit when we do not know how to move forward. Sitting patiently in the not knowing — without feeling judgment, shame or frustration — can cultivate excitement and thirst, which provide important insight. This energy can create the space for important collaborations to develop, reveal new strategies and allow members and leaders the chance to weigh-in on the conversation in a genuine way.

8. Creating Space to Heal and Transform Ourselves

Acknowledging the world as an oppressive place means also acknowledging its negative impact on our minds, bodies and spirits. Healing from the pain this oppression causes within us is an important task for activists and organizers. It is not just a side task to the real work of campaigns and door knocking. It is essential if we want to successfully change systemic conditions. Our organizations should and must create the space for this type of healing within our organizing models.

Often, the legacy of oppression makes us think we do not deserve healing. This legacy encourages us to feel guilty for prioritizing ourselves. When we are working in crisis mode, we don't feel we have the time for healing. We have to confront these internalized messages of low self-worth and demand the healing we deserve. Currently, only people with resources have access to

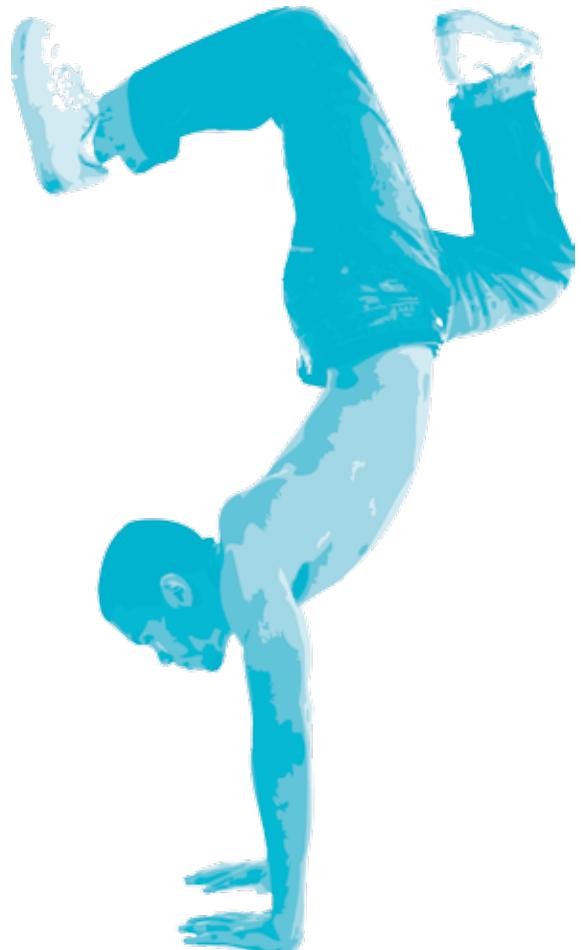
mental healthcare and other types of healing support. Democratizing wellness resources will be crucial to the success of our movements. Organizers can play a key role in making this happen by providing access to healers and mental healthcare professionals. We can make these priorities in our approach to leadership development. This could mean bringing in a counselor to organizationally sponsored sessions on addiction, domestic violence, depression, etc. It could also mean working with healers to hold spiritual council or ceremony for members and staff to open, share, grieve and let go of negative emotions.

As we hold each other accountable to acting in new ways — seeing ourselves as powerful, becoming emotionally intelligent and mature, able to hold intense emotion — we are developing new ways to treat ourselves and each other. Undoubtedly, we will also create new standards of health and wellness for our communities, organizations and the movement as a whole. In our leadership development work, we should develop these skills and value them on par with skills like public speaking and outreach. If we do our work well, community members will be able to see the concrete benefits of organizations - experiencing them as the vital hubs of our communities. Living the values we speak is the best outreach strategy we have.

9. Expanding Awareness and Agility to Act

Through practice we can develop an expanded awareness of our surroundings, the present moment and our power to make change. This is ultimately what every organizer wants and needs to be able to do. By grounding ourselves in our values, linking individual and group transformation, centralizing relationships, evolving our understanding of power and building alignment we are creating a more agile and effective social justice movement.

This awareness is particularly important during times of major change in our political and cultural context. With the 2008 election, progressive organizers suddenly found they had access to and support from decision makers on a scale no one dreamed possible. The organizers most ready to take advantage of this sea change were the ones who had developed a big vision, a proactive stance; they were ready to build new relationships and roles for themselves. By preparing ourselves to act under changing conditions, we will be ready and able to leverage unexpected opportunities when they arise.



Conclusions

We are living at a unique historical moment, a time of deep crisis and tremendous opportunity. The profound global environmental, economic and political challenges we face will shape every generation that lives through this time. On one hand, these challenges cause suffering for millions of people. On the other, these challenges bring us together in our shared humanity and our desire to be whole, interdependent and sustainable. As social justice organizers we must grapple with this duality, finding ways we can lead that help us transform our communities, our societies and ourselves.

As described in this report, organizers are responding to these conditions creatively. With great courage, they are opening themselves to the unknown and giving birth to a renewed approach to social change. The following are our conclusions about the contributions these leaders are making to the field.

- **Individuals in the social justice movement are coming out of the spiritual closet; they are seeking transformative practices as a way to be more integrated, interconnected and whole.** Across the country, in many different communities, organizers have responded to this moment in time by seeking out transformative and spiritual practices for guidance. This journey often starts as a personal search for balance and sustainability in their own lives, but soon leads them question leadership and organizing practices in the broader movement. For most this requires a fundamental leap of faith. In order to make the kind of transformation they want (in themselves or the movement), they must jump into the unknown, which includes the possibility of losing or leaving a community and identity they love. Most organizers in this report described how this journey required them to let go of old ways of seeing themselves, the world and the movement. Letting go of these familiar habits often became very uncomfortable and sometimes deeply scary, but ultimately liberating and healing. By coming out of the closet, they are finding others who share the same holistic vision, and this is giving them new breath and awareness for what's possible in their lives, their organizations and the movement.
- **These leaders are simultaneously choosing different transformative paths and coming to some similar conclusions about movement building.** Frontline organizers are using a diverse range of practices as they seek to balance their commitment to political/outward transformation with spiritual/inward transformation. The diverse approaches reflect the complex contexts people are coming out of. An individual or community's culture and tradition, history of trauma and access to resources shape the modalities people choose. Some emphasize healing, others leadership and others insight and awareness.

While there is great diversity in organizers' approaches, there is also profound unity. As organizers confront the disconnection, fragmentation and objectification that defines dominant culture, they seek practices that will counteract, heal and transform these experiences. They are working toward deeper embodiment, awareness, connection, interdependence and a life-giving sense of power.

Transformative practice and, by extension, transformative organizing constitute the big umbrella for organizers, including spiritual, religious, cultural, embodiment and other practices. As organizers seek to integrate transformative practice into daily organizing and movement building they are reaffirming an important truth: There is richness in diversity. Fundamentally each path has important insights for people's individual contexts, and the wisdom that emerges from each path can emerge to inform the movement as a whole.

- **The combined impact of these leaders' transformative practice is beginning to shift movement culture.** Movement culture can be thought of as the shared conscious and unconscious values, beliefs, behaviors and assumptions underlying our work. This culture shapes and informs who and how we are in the world. As more and more movement leaders consciously wrestle with how to shift their lives and work in the movement, they have a collective influence on movement culture and, ultimately, help to shift how we approach social justice. Organizers who integrate transformative practice into their lives are often better able to see and communicate the true costs of our current culture and to propose alternative solutions that are truly sustainable.

As individual leaders integrate transformative practice into their lives, they are becoming "way-showers" within the social justice movement, helping groups and the broader movement to:

- **Ground our work in core values, purpose and vision** that support long-term change such as interconnectedness, multigenerational community, sustainability, justice and dignity.
- **Generate a new stance** and model proactive, rather than reactive, leadership. This includes a new sense of their own and others' power; a new, less binary relationship to the problem or target; and an expanded sense of what is possible and how to achieve it.
- **Cultivate the qualities and capacities we need** in the movement and the world we envision. In addition to those mentioned above, some of the most common include openness to new approaches, relationships, roles and a greater comfort with risk and the unknown.
- **Develop new, shared movement building practices** including new organizing, leadership development, alliance building and communication models.

Recommendations

Transformative movement building holds enormous promise for social justice leaders and all who wish to make our world more sustainable, just and interdependent. In its current form, transformative practice is new in the secular progressive/Left movement. The following are recommendations for funders, intermediaries and leaders who want to move this work forward:

- **Document the work of social justice organizations that are applying transformative practice at the group level (in organizations, alliances, campaigns).** This report focused primarily on the experiences of individual leaders and teachers who are integrating transformative practice into their lives and work. It does not go in depth about how organizations are integrating practice at the group level and how this, in turn, influences their organizational culture, organizing, strategies and alliance practices. A next step in understanding transformative movement building would be to document and analyze the work at this level.
- **Convene leaders of frontline social justice organizations to share and learn from each other's work applying transformative practice to leadership development, organizational development, organizing and movement building.** While the fields of transformative movement building and spiritual activism are still new, there have been some convenings of intermediaries, trainers and teachers. For example, in 2009, The Seasons Fund for Social Transformation convened "Deep Change: Transforming the Practice of Social Justice," a gathering that centralized concerns of frontline social justice organizations. This type of peer exchange, learning and network development is critical to deepen the integration of transformative practice within the social justice movement.
- **Invest in frontline social justice organizations that are leading this work.** Frontline social justice organizations are the heart and soul of the social justice movement. As organizations that interface directly with impacted communities, they are critical to social change. By investing in the organizations that are innovating and modeling transformative organizing/alliance building funders and intermediaries will support the movement as a whole.
- **Support networks, alliances and intermediaries that are providing infrastructure and support to individual leaders and organizations integrating spiritual and transformative practice into movement building work.** Networks and alliances play critical roles in helping organizations function as a movement that is more than the sum of its parts. By supporting networks and alliances that are integrating spiritual and transformative practice into their work, funders can invest in the infrastructure for a new, transformational social justice movement. Furthermore, intermediaries often provide much needed technical support, training and perspective to organizations and alliances. By supporting the groups who are supporting movement leaders, funders can help build a stronger, more sustainable movement.

Bibliography

OTSC builds on and furthers an incredible body of thinking related to spirituality and social justice. We are indebted to and appreciative of the insight provided by the works below.

Brown, Tara, ed. (2008). *Documentation and Evaluation of Inner Work for Social Transformation*. Santa Fe, NM: Seasons Fund for Social Transformation.

Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. (2002). *Inviting the World to Transform: Nourishing Social Justice Work with Contemplative Practice*. Northampton, MA.

Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. (2007). *The Activists' Ally: Contemplative Tools for Social Change*. Northampton, MA.

Dennis, Simon. (2008). *Organizational Support for Social Transformation: A Description of "TransformationalCapacity.org."*

Fellner, Kim. (2000). *Hearts on Fire: How Do We Keep From Burning Out?* Shelterforce Online. <http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/113/fellner.html>

Ginwright, Shawn. (2009). *Black Youth Rising: Radical Healing and Activism in Urban America: Introduction*. Teachers College Press:. New York, NY.

hooks, bell. (1999). "Chapter: Divine Inspiration - Writing and Spirituality." *Remembered Rapture*. Henry Holt and Company, LLC: New York, NY.

Horwitz, Claudia, & Jesse Maceo Vega-Frey. (2006). *Spiritual Activism and Liberation Spirituality: Pathways to Collective Liberation*. Mebane, NC: stone circles.

Movement Strategy Center. (2007). *Out of the Spiritual Closet: How Spiritual Activism is Transforming Organizing*. Oakland, CA.

Movement Strategy Center. (2007). *Out of the Spiritual Closet: Landscape Map for Transformational Organizing*. Oakland, CA.

Movement Strategy Center. (2007). *Spirit in Motion: Transformational Organizing Toolkit*. Oakland, CA.

Seasons Fund for Social Transformation. (n.d.) Brochure.

Shash Yázhí. (2005). *The Journey from Mind to Spirit*. Oakland, CA: Movement Strategy Center.

Sherman, Scott D. (2003). "The Theory of Transformative Action." In "Strategies for Success in the Environmental Justice Movement." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan.

Social Justice Leadership. (2008). *Report on the Transformative Organizing Initiative Opening Retreat*. Social Justice Leadership: New York, NY.

stone circles. (2005). *Spiritual Activism: Claiming the Poetry and Ideology of a Liberation Spirituality* (report from gathering at Garrison, NY, June 2005).

stone circles. (2007). *Strategy Map of Liberation Spirituality*. Mebane, NC: stone circles.

Worksheets: Understanding the Field and Shaping the Landscape

This field scan pulls together stories of organizers and activists around the country who are working to find new, more effective ways to bring about social change. This work builds upon a growing body of thinking and analysis on transformational change. This appendix outlines some of the efforts to define and advance the field, including some key examples.

MSC is also looking for feedback on this field scan. We invite input and guidance in shaping our next round of conversations with the field: What are your burning questions and needs? What are the aspects of your work that you most want to share? What are the things you most want to learn about the work of your peers and others in the field? In the following section we include some worksheets for reflection. We invite you to share responses with us so we may deepen the conversation underway on this work.

Worksheet 1: Sharing Your Story

In this report you read stories of organizers and activists who have found a transformative practice that helps them transform themselves and their leadership. We need a movement that catalyzes deep change in our world. The first step in changing the culture of the progressive movement is to create more opportunities for leaders to tell their stories. By sharing how organizers have connected their inner work to more impactful collective work and social change, we will promote deeper and more meaningful transformation.

If you have a story we want to hear it!

You can share it anonymously or include your name and organization. The information you share will help inform the expansion of the report you just read. We will also post stories on the MSC website so more of your voices can be heard.

We want to ask you the **same three basic questions** we asked the other activists we interviewed. Tell us how you have explored these questions in your personal development and work:

- What has been keeping us stuck?
- What is the new way?
- How do we move forward?

Draft your story, then email it with the subject heading "TMB Stories" to info@movementstrategy.org or mail it to:

Transformational Movement Building Stories
 Movement Strategy Center
 1611 Telegraph Avenue, Suite 510
 Oakland, CA 94612

Worksheet 2: Defining This Community

The community of people and organizations interested in the intersection of inner work/spiritual practice and outer work/systems change is broad and diverse. At one end of the spectrum are those groups starting from a spiritual or religious context and working to deepen the political and social change dimension to their work. At the other end of the spectrum are those groups starting from a political context (focused on systems change) and looking to deepen the contemplative or spiritual dimension of their work. And in between those two poles you will find many variations, for example groups who approach the intersection from a cultural or community standpoint in which the political and spiritual remain intertwined.

This is important because groups situated at different points on this spectrum often use different words and tell different stories about the significance of this intersection. Here are some of the ways that this work is named and understood by people in the field:

- Transformational Organizing and Movement Building
- Holistic and Integrated Social Change
- Leadership
- Culture and Traditional Way of Life
- Spiritual Activism
- Liberation Spirituality
- Engaged Spirituality/Religion

Our communities can be united by a shared interest in balancing the change models our society defines as oppositional: inner and outer transformation. Because we are starting in different places on the spectrum and have different aspirations for the change process, our work to create this balance can look very different. This diversity in the community is not only okay; it is our strength. It also helps balance a tendency for many of us to start from a place of judgment for people and groups at different points on the spectrum.

How Do You See This Work?

Are there ways that you see or understand this work that are not reflected in the other frameworks that have been offered? Share your story, and feel free to use words or images to communicate your vision:

Field Map: Transformational Movement Building Community

The organizations working toward greater integration of spirituality and social justice reflect all sectors and models of change work — from direct service providers to intermediaries. These organizations' work spans many different areas including arts, service and community building. In the following Field Map, we categorize organizations by their vehicle type (general function and form) as defined below.

- **Alliances and Networks:** Formations of two or more groups for purposes of mutual support, joint campaigns or initiatives and information sharing.
- **Constituency-Based Organizations and Frontline Groups:** Groups providing services, advocacy and organizing with a constituency or client base.
- **Foundations and Donors:** Organizations (foundations) and individuals (donors) engaged in philanthropy to organizations and initiatives.
- **Intermediaries:** Organizations that provide specific capacity-building support to frontline groups.
- **Retreat Centers and Spiritual Communities:** Places and spaces specifically formed to cultivate personal as well as organizational sustainability and spiritual development.
- **Trainers, Facilitators, Healers:** Individuals with tools and services to offer in the form of training, facilitation and healing.

Alliances and Networks

Grassroots Global Justice (North Miami, FL)
 National Organizers Alliance (Washington, DC)
 Southern Coalition for Social Justice (Durham, NC)

Audre Lorde Project (Brooklyn, NY)

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps (New York, NY)

Barrios Unidos (Santa Cruz, CA)

Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries (Oakview, CA)

Bay Area Nonviolent Communication (Oakland, CA)

Center for Community Action (Lumberton, NC)

Center for Community Change (Washington, DC)

Center for Economic Justice (Austin, TX)

Center for Media Justice (Oakland, CA)

Center for Participatory Change (Asheville, NC)

Center for Whole Communities (Fayston, VT)

Clergy and Laity for United Economic Justice (Los Angeles, CA)

Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (New York, NY)

Community Justice Network for Youth (San Francisco, CA)

Derechos Para Todos (Denver, CO)

Domestic Workers United (New York, NY)

Eagle Evolution (Hull, MA)

Constituency-Based Organizations and Frontline Groups

21st Century Youth Leadership Movement (Selma, AL)
 AIDS Quilt Project (Atlanta, GA)
 Alliance for a New Humanity (San Juan, Puerto Rico)
 Amnesty International (Atlanta, GA)
 Art for Change (New York, NY)
 Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (Oakland, CA)
 Asian Pacific Environmental Network (Oakland, CA)
 Asian Youth for Policy Advocacy and Leadership (Oakland, CA)
 Atlanta Transformative Justice Collaborative (Dallas, GA)

Out of the Spiritual Closet

Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (Oakland, CA)
Environmental Health Fund (Jamaica Plain, NY)
Friends and Families of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (Atlanta, GA)
FIERCE (New York, NY)
Forest Ethics (Bellingham, WA)
Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE) (New York, NY)
Gamaliel Foundation (Minneapolis, MN)
Garment Workers Center (Los Angeles, CA)
Generation Five (Berkeley, CA)
Generations Ahead (Oakland, CA)
Global Grassroots (Hanover, NH)
Grassroots Leadership (Charlotte, NC)
Greater Birmingham Ministries (Birmingham, AL)
Green For All (Oakland, CA)
Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Greensboro, NC)
Homey (San Francisco, CA)
Jewcyc (New York, NY)
Kindred (Decatur, GA)
LAANE (Los Angeles, CA)
Latino Union of Chicago (Chicago, IL)
Louisiana Injured Workers Union (New Orleans, LA)
Make the Road (Elmhurst, NY)
Miami Workers Center (Miami, FL)
Migration Policy and Resource Center (Los Angeles, CA)
Mothers on the Move (Bronx, NY)
Native Movement (Fairbanks, AK)
New Life Women's Leadership (Williamston, NC)
Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation (Hillsboro, NC)
People Organized to Win Employment Rights (San Francisco, CA)
Prison Dharma Network (Boulder, CO)
Rethink New Orleans (New Orleans, LA)
Roca (Chelsea, MA)
SONG: Southerners on New Ground (Atlanta, GA)
St. Peters Housing Committee (San Francisco, CA)
Student Action with Farmworkers (Durham, NC)
Success: A New Beginning (Los Angeles, CA)
Boston Ten Point Coalition (Jamaica Plain, MA)
The Engage Network (Albany, CA)
The Interdependence Project (Brooklyn, NY)
The Power of Hope (Seattle, WA)

The Sojourner Group (Durham, NC)
Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation (Porcupine, SD)
TIGRA: Transnational Institute for Grassroots Research & Action (Oakland, CA)
United Religions Initiative (San Francisco, CA)
Urban Peace Movement (Oakland, CA)
Village for Arts and Humanities (Philadelphia, PA)
YES! (Santa Cruz, CA)
Young Women United (Albuquerque, NM)
Youth Together (Oakland, CA)

Foundations and Donors

Agape Foundation (San Francisco, CA)
Akonadi Foundation (Oakland, CA)
Cycle of Life Foundation
Common Fire Foundation (Tivoli, NY)
Damien Foundation
Fetzer Institute (Kalamazoo, MI)
Findhorn Foundation (Findhorn, Morayshire, Scotland)
Ford Foundation (New York, NY)
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (Washington, DC)
Greyston Foundation (Yonkers, NY)
Hidden Leaf Foundation (Occidental, CA)
Human Kindness Foundation (Durham, NC)
Inspired Legacies (Houston, TX)
Jewish Funds for Justice (New York, NY)
Kalliopeia Foundation (San Rafael, CA)
Katz Family Foundation (Madison, WI)
Lifebridge Foundation (High Falls, NY)
Nathan Cummings Foundation (New York , NY)
Seasons Fund (Santa Fe, NM)
Shinnyo-en Foundation (San Francisco, CA)
The Angell Foundation (Los Angeles, CA)
Third Wave Foundation (New York, NY)
Twenty First Century Foundation (New York, NY)
UU Veatch Program at Shelter Rock (Manhasset, NY)
W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Battle Creek, MI)

Intermediaries

Alliance for Spiritual Community (Laguna Niguel, CA)
Berkana Institute (virtual office: www.berkana.org)
Black Brown Projects (Brooklyn, NY)

Buddhist Peace Fellowship (Berkeley, CA)
 Center for Action and Contemplation (Albuquerque, NM)
 Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (Northampton, MA)
 Center for Non-Violent Communication (Albuquerque, NM)
 Center for Third World Organizing (Oakland, CA)
 Design Studio for Social Intervention (Boston, MA)
 Generative Somatics (Oakland, CA)
 M.K. Gandhi Institute for Non Violence (Rochester, NY)
 Grassroots Media Strategy (Moab, UT)
 Grassroots Policy (Rosalinda, MA)
 Hollyhock Leadership Institute (Vancouver, BC, Canada)
 Institute for Jewish Spirituality (New York, NY)
 Institute of Research on Unlimited Love (Stony Brook, NY)
 Institute of Zen Studies (Honolulu, HI)
 Interaction Institute for Social Change (Dorchester, MA)
 IONS: Institute of Noetic Sciences (Petaluma, CA)
 Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity (Columbus, OH)
 La Plazita Institute (Albuquerque, NM)
 Movement Generation Justice & Ecology Project (Oakland, CA)
 Movement Strategy Center (Oakland, CA)
 National Community Development Institute (Oakland, CA)
 One Life Institute (Oakland, CA)
 Progressive Technology Project (Minneapolis, MN)
 Quiñones-Rosado, Raúl (Caguas, Puerto Rico)
 Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South (Durham, NC)
 Rockwood Leadership Institute (Berkeley, CA)
 Ruckus Society (Oakland, CA)
 School of Unity and Liberation (Oakland, CA)
 Servant Leadership School (Greensboro, NC)
 Social and Public Art Resource Center (Los Angeles, CA)
 Social Justice Leadership (New York, NY)
 Social Transformation Project (Oakland, CA)
 Southern Echo (Jackson, MS)
 Spirit in Action (Belchertown, MA)
 stone circles (Mebane, NC)
 Sustaining the Soul (virtual location: sustainingthesoulthatserves.org)
 Tools for Change (Seattle, WA)
 Wildflowers Institute (San Francisco, CA)
 Women's Theological Center (Boston, MA)

Retreat Centers and Spiritual Communities

Blue Mountain Center for Meditation (Tomales, CA)
 Center for Transformational Change (Berkeley, CA)
 Garrison Institute (Garrison, New York)
 Manzanita Village (Warner Springs, CA)
 Omega (Rhinebeck, NY)
 Plum Village (France)
 Vallecitos Mountain Refuge (Taos, NM)
 Windcall (Various Location)
 Zen Peacemaker Order (Montague, MA)

Individual Trainers, Facilitators, Healers and Researchers

Abdul-Mumin, Jah'Shams (Los Angeles, CA)
 Bagby, Rachel (Philadelphia, PA)
 Bassler Koga, Terrice (Sacramento, CA)
 Burney Scott, Omisade (Durham, NC)
 Chambliss, Rev. Arrington (Marblehead, MA)
 Chen, Viveka (San Francisco Bay Area, CA)
 DIG IN (Davis, CA)
 Garrett, Elisabeth (Berkeley, CA)
 Gutierrez, Raquel (Tempe, AZ)
 Hodge, Gregory (Oakland, CA)
 Kaur, Krishna (Los Angeles, CA)
 Keepin, Will (Clinton, WA)
 Leapfrog Consulting (Oakland, CA)
 Lugovina, Rev. Pacogenkoji (Bronx, NY)
 McDonald, Michele (Honolulu, HI)
 New World Consulting (Nyack, NY)
 Ryumon Gutierrez Baldoquin, Rev. H. (San Francisco, CA)
 Sacred Slam (Watertown, MA)
 Sawyer, David (Portland, OR)
 Seligman, Adam (Boston, MA)
 Shash Yazhi (Hull, MA)
 Simmons, Esmerelda (Brooklyn, NY)
 Sol, Rabbi Felicia (New York, NY)
 Toby Herzlich and Company (Santa Fe, NM)
 Transformational Capacity Project (White River, VT)

Frameworks From the Field

Practitioners in the field articulate the connection between spirituality and social justice in myriad ways. This section shares several frameworks for understanding and describing this work. In addition to sharing the central visual related to each framework, the source is listed for the reader to find more in depth narrative. Some of these pieces can be found in the back of the “Deep Change” conference packet (see Bibliography).

Liberation Spirituality Strategy Map

Source: stone circles

Transformational Organizing Landscape Map

Source: Movement Strategy Center

Tree of Contemplative Practice

Source: Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Organizing Map with Spirit at the Center

Source: Movement Strategy Center

Liberation Spirituality Strategy Map

Source: stone circles

Looking to the vast spectrum of work being done in liberation spirituality today, stone circles is creating an interactive web-based strategy map so that anyone interested in the spiritual activism can find kindred activists, organizations, and the tools to get started or deepen their work. Organizations and groups whose work and programs meet basic criteria will be able to be post on this site and used by anyone who wishes to use it. Practitioners will be able to find an array of organizations, resources, thinking and potential collaborators in nine specific categories. Clicking on their name will lead to a brief description of the organization, their work, and a link to their website, if they have one. Searches by geography and key words will also be featured, making the map as user-friendly as possible. The nine categories are:

Art & Culture	Practice-based Engagement
Healing	Resources
Leadership & Training	Spiritual Centers and Communities
Media	Theory & Research
Network & Community Building	

This overview document includes:

1. Quilt design for the homepage of the map
2. Partial alphabetical listing of the groups already in the database.
3. Definitions of each category and sample organizations for each
4. A mandala of how these strategies relate to each other and the overall work of spiritual activism and liberation spirituality. More on this will be forthcoming.

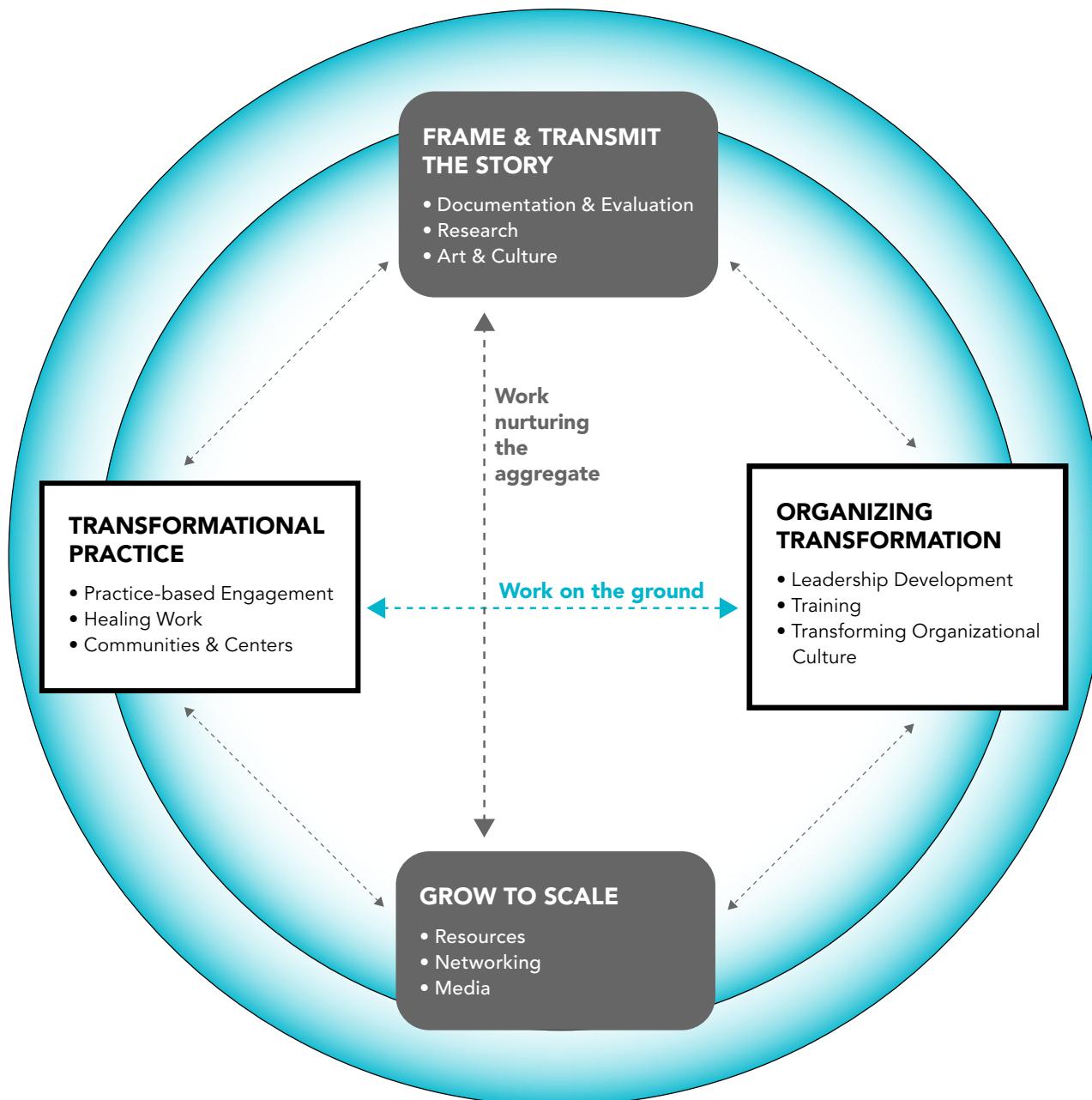
The map will be integrated into the upcoming website, www.liberationspirituality.org.

It has been funded by the Ford Foundation, the Hidden Leaf Foundation and the Nathan Cummings Foundation.



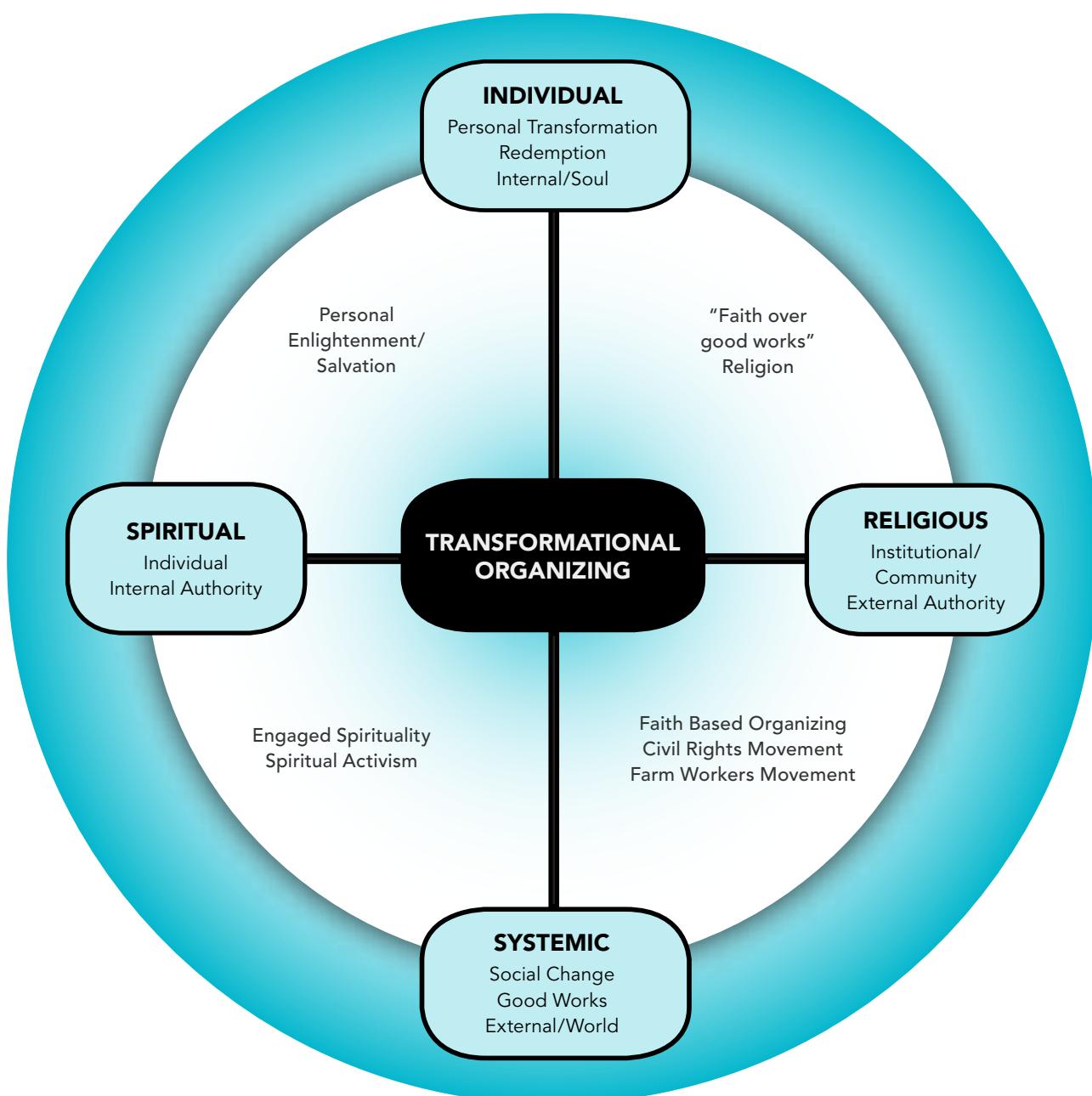
Liberation Spirituality Strategy Map

Source: stone circles



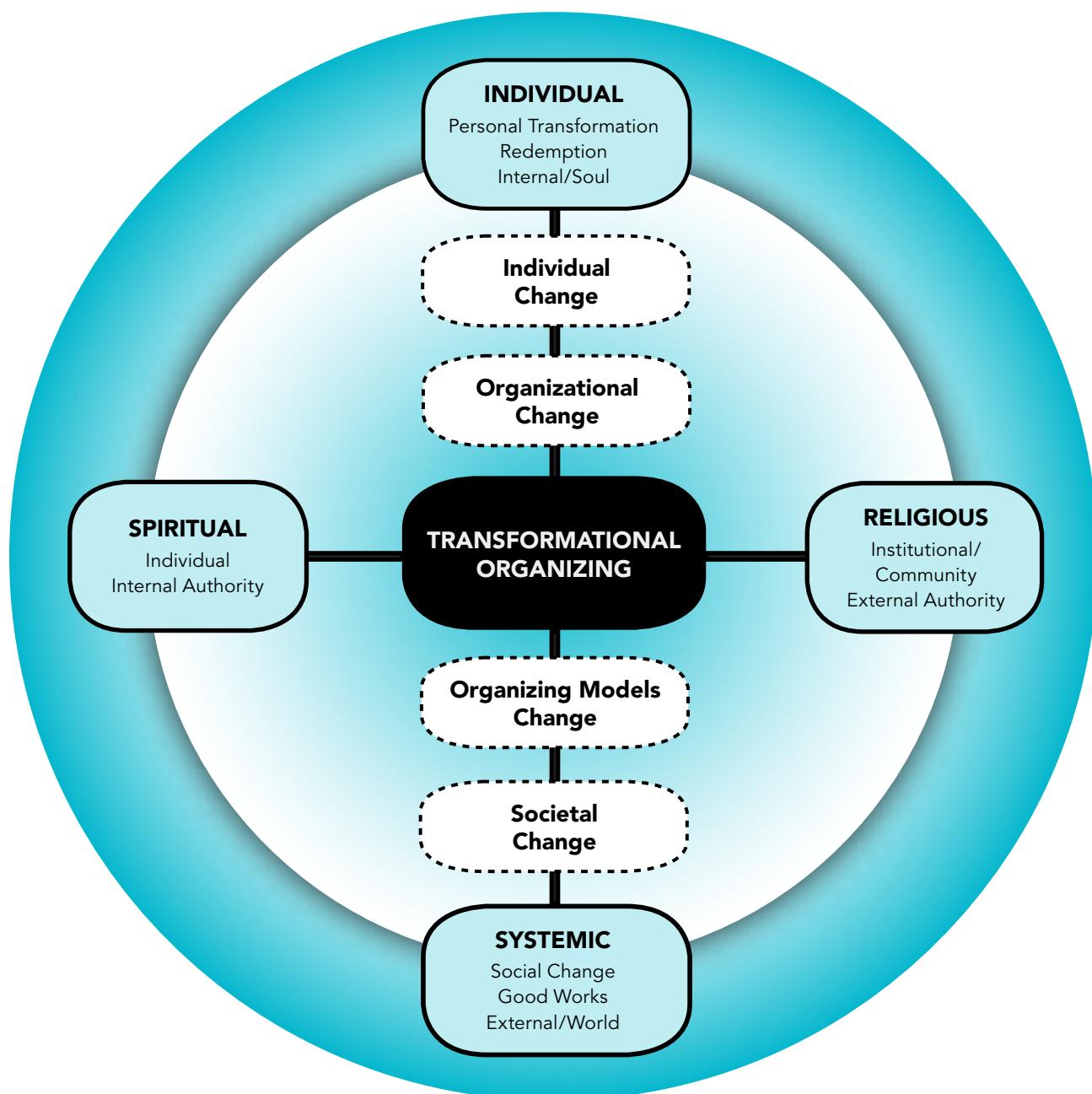
Transformational Organizing Landscape Map 1

Source: Movement Strategy Center



Transformational Organizing Landscape Map 2

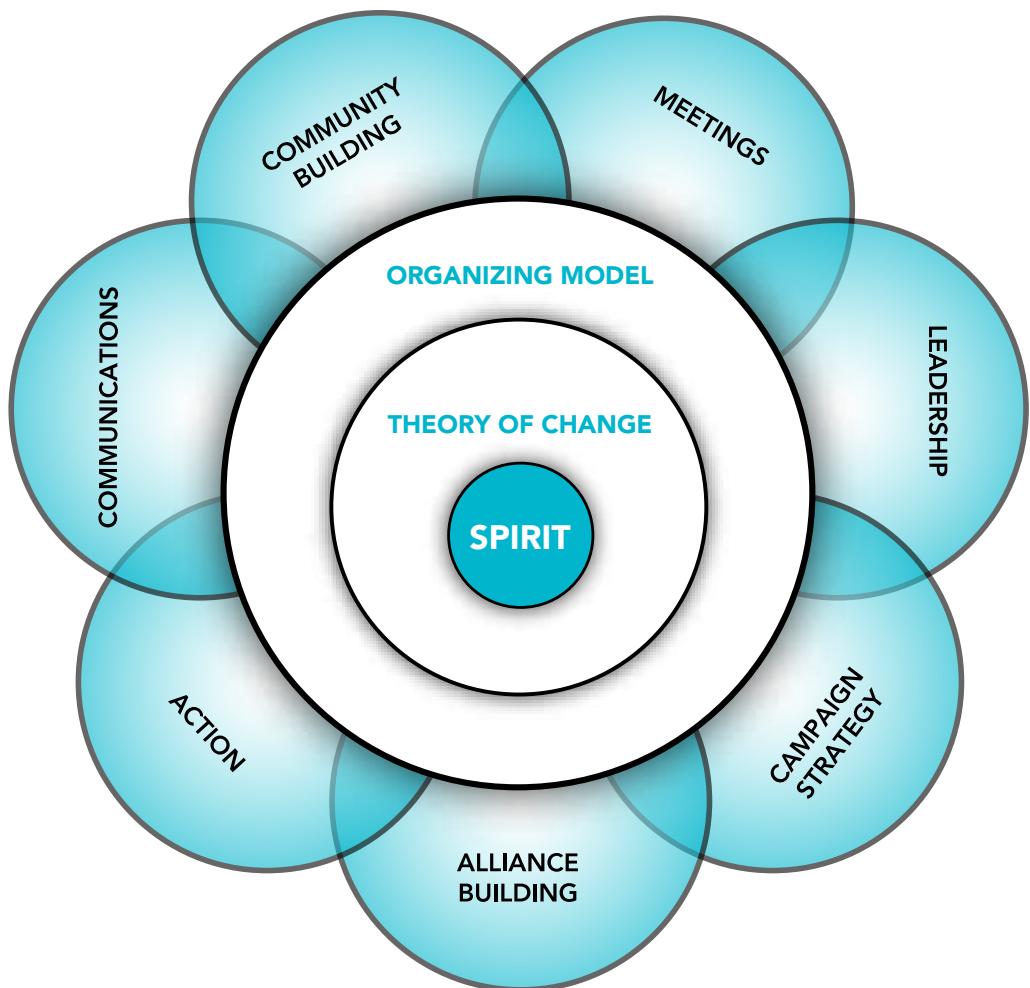
Source: Movement Strategy Center





Organizing Map with Spirit at the Center

Source: Movement Strategy Center



Mapping Our Campaigns

How do each of these areas of organizing need to change as we integrate spirit into our theory of change and organizing model?



Coming Soon: Transformative Movement Building in Frontline Organizations

Phase Two of MSC's Transformational Movement Building (TMB) Series will explore the way organizers are integrating transformative and spiritual practice at the group level. Specifically, we will look at how these practices are shaping organizational culture, organizing practice and movement building strategies. The following are snapshots of how some frontline organizations are beginning to transform their organizing practice.

- **Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice** (Oakland, CA) organizes low-income Southeast Asian women for reproductive justice. Using practices from Zen master Norma Wong, youth organizers focus their leadership development on finding core power. Lead organizers teach the youth breathing, meditation and tai-chi.
- **Domestic Workers United** (New York, NY) describes membership meetings as 'church' and uses people's faith in humanity and moral goodness to agitate toward action. They have included yoga and other physical healing methods in their membership meetings in order to provide a collective healing space.
- **Communities for a Better Environment** (Oakland, CA) organizes low-income communities of color exposed to toxic pollution to fight for healthier neighborhoods. Through their multi-year campaign against Chevron refineries in Richmond, California, they have developed a relationship with their target. Before every meeting with Chevron's leader, CBE organizers and members pray for compassion and the ability to hold him accountable. In addition, CBE has incorporated spirituality into their understanding of "cumulative impact," a term used by environmental justice groups to convey the impact of multiple stressors on an environment.
- **Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth** (San Francisco, CA) protested San Francisco's family unfriendly policies by turning a city council meeting into a family picnic. Members piled into council chambers ready for a picnic and served council members food to get their message across.
- **Young Women United** (Albuquerque, NM) sees their role as working to decolonize and re-tribalize young women of color in Albuquerque. They have created two circles of young women, one for high school girls and the other for twenty-somethings. Each meets once a week. These circles help young women reclaim their minds, bodies and spirits and build a powerful community.
- **Southerners on New Ground** (Durham, NC) told funders they were unable to tell the what their next project would be until they talked to their constituency. They used a better part of a year traveling around the South to have conversation with queer community members.

Allowing spirit to guide their planning process, they let go of any ideas they had about what SONG should do and instead allowed the answers to come to them. As a result, their members are much more engaged in their projects.

- **Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation** (Pine Ridge Reservation, ND) was developed after a spiritual movement connecting young people to traditional spiritual practices and culture took root in their community. They use a community development model because it enables them to tackle the complex economic, social and cultural issues in their community in a holistic way. In their first project the community built a center that serves as a hub for social and spiritual gatherings in the community. Now, they are developing a state-of-the-art sustainable housing development designed and built in collaboration with community members and green architects.

Deep Change: Images of a Changing Movement

In June 2009, Movement Strategy Center partnered with Rockwood Leadership Institute and stone circles to convene Deep Change: Transforming the Practice of Social Justice, a gathering that brought together over 100 social justice leaders, organizations, and spirit and sustainability practitioners funders from around the country. Supported by the Seasons Fund for Social Transformation, this national gathering explored how these leader-practitioners are integrating transformational practices into their movement building work. Deep Change tapped into participants deep longing for something new and holistic that integrates their commitments to justice, healing and liberation. The gathering focused on frontline social justice groups that are beginning to embody and advance this new transformative social change model. The core goals for Deep Change were to advance and grow the shared wisdom, peer networks, and resources for this work.

Growing the Field of Transformative Social Change

Deep Change grew out of a series of formal and informal conversations about the integration of spiritual and reflective practices into the work for social transformation. In June 2005, 50 practitioners came together for "Spiritual Activism: Claiming the Poetry and Ideology of a Liberation Spirituality", a gathering led by stone circles at the Garrison Institute. In May 2006, funders and practitioners began developing a collaborative fund for spiritual activism and social transformation. In 2007, this became the Seasons Fund for Social Transformation (www.seasonsfund.org). Deep Change helped to take this work to a new level by bringing together Season Fund grantees with other leader-practitioners in the field.

The Images In This Report

Many of the images in this report are from the Deep Change gathering. We are deeply indebted to stone circles, the lead organizer of the gathering, and Willie Davis, the gathering's photographer, for sharing these beautiful images. For more images from the gathering and Willie Davis' work visit:

- Willie Davis Photography: www.williedavis.com
- Deep Change: <http://sites.google.com/a/deepchangegathering.org/home/Home>
- stone circles: www.stonecircles.org



Attributions

Interviewees: Bill Aal, Kimberly Aceves, Adriann Barboa, Caitlin Breedlove, Viveka Chen, Stosh Cotler, Andre Carothers, Trishala Deb, Mordecai Ettinger, Elisabeth (Lisa) Garrett, Mia Herndon, Claudia Horwitz, Spenta Kandawalla, Jidan Koon, Malachi Larrabee-Garza, Kimi Lee, Jason Negrón-Gonzales, Mateo Nube, Carla Pérez, Dana Ginn Paredes, Gihan Perera, Maria Poblet, Ai-jen Poo, Rose Sackey-Milligan, Kathy Sanchez, Aparna Shah, Jesus Solorio, Jen Soriano, Nick Tilsen, Claire Tran, Cindy Wiesner, Norma Wong and Shash Yázhí.

Authors: Kristen Zimmerman, Neelam Pathikonda, Brenda Salgado and Taj James of Movement Strategy Center

Editors: Julie Quiroz-Martínez and Jose Flores

Copyeditor: Amy Sonnie

Design: Micah Bazant, www.micahbazant.com

Printing: Dakota Press

Funded By: Seasons Fund for Social Transformation

Appreciations:

Thank you to the Deborah Higgins of The Fetzer Institute, Sarah Ghorse of Seasons Fund for Social Transformation and Tara Brown of Hidden Leaf Foundation for your amazing insights into the development of this field and your generous support of this report. It is a true blessing to have partners in philanthropy who also work to embody the transformational principles outlined here in their work with communities.

Thank you to Shash Yázhí and Neelam Pathikonda for your deep commitment and vision for this work. This project owes a depth of gratitude to your efforts.

We are also deeply grateful to Mike Edwards, formerly with the Ford Foundation, and Don Miller, executive director of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California, for their help in sharpening the theoretical framework of the paper and supporting the development of the original research plan.

This report is also deeply informed by the work of Eveline Shen at Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice and Staci Haines of Generative Somatics. We continue to learn from and be inspired by your work integrating transformative practice into social justice movements.



Movement Strategy Center
1611 Telegraph Ave., Suite 510
Oakland, CA 94612
ph: 510.444.0640
info@movementstrategy.org
www.movementstrategy.org

ISBN 0-9754778-2-X