



SHIFTING POWER FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Lessons on Becoming Member-Led
from Mujeres Unidas y Activas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Lessons and Levers for Organization-Wide Transformation (Chart)



Photo Credit: ???

“ We value the leadership of immigrant women and we seek to construct an organization that is able to develop and support our leadership not only to advance, but to live our mission. **(from MUA’s Philosophy on Identity & Leadership)**

“ When we develop the leadership of immigrant women within the staff, we make sure that our organization continues to function even if individual staff members transition out of the organization. It opens up the possibility to internally hire grassroots Latina immigrants, which is central to the philosophy of our organization. **(María)**

“ Futuro Fuerte has helped me develop a type of leadership that is not based on personal prominence, but that opens up spaces for other leaders to take on bigger roles. It has helped me become a better listener and allow myself to disagree. It has pushed me to become a leader in different ways. **(Ariana)**

“ Futuro Fuerte has also helped me dream more, to be able to say ‘I can be a supervisor’ even though I am an immigrant woman, in the process of learning English as a second language, and learning new technology. I feel strong, confident in my leadership, able to say ‘I can grow, and others can grow with me too’. **(Laura)**

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the ongoing work to bring about social justice, many movement-building groups are looking inside their own organizations to ask: Who leads? How is power used? Are we *living* our mission even as we work to bring it into being in the world?

Building leadership and lifting up skills from the lived experience of those most directly impacted by inequity and injustice is essential for long-term change and effective movement-building. While many movement organizations make an active commitment to building leadership in the communities they organize, relatively few member-leaders hold positions of strategic leadership *within* organizations. For groups making an explicit commitment to being member-led, what does it take to fully realize that vision?



Photo Credit: Rucha Chitnis

This report shares experience from one organization's journey. Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA)¹ is a grassroots organization of Latina immigrant women with a double mission: to promote personal transformation *and* to build community power for social and economic justice. Since 1990 MUA has been committed to leadership from grassroots members and to creating member-led decision-making structures. To fully embody and uphold their vision of becoming a predominantly member-led organization, MUA recognizes time and resources must be invested in developing member leadership at multiple levels of the organization's work including: grassroots base-building, internal operations and management, fundraising, public speaking and outreach, and coalition-building with movement allies.

MUA's Futuro Fuerte (Strong Future) initiative was born out of this commitment. Over a period of three years, the initiative has strengthened MUA's staff leadership, professional development and internal practices to become a more sustainable and successful Latina immigrant-led organization. MUA's nuanced and complex approach aims at creating a model that lifts up immigrant women's leadership and self-determination at every level of the organization, while also actively creating and promoting solidarity and shared leadership with US-born women.

MUA partnered with RoadMap consultants Ana Perez² and Emily Goldfarb,³ long-time allies and organizational development practitioners, to design and facilitate

1 <http://mujeresunidas.net/>

2 <https://roadmapconsulting.org/consultants/ana-perez-consultant/>

3 <https://roadmapconsulting.org/consultants/emily-goldfarb-director-and-consultant>

Futuro Fuerte. RoadMap⁴ is proud to collaborate with MUA to document and share this work as inspiration to other movement-builders and allies.

Grounded in lessons from MUA's experience and the Futuro Fuerte process, RoadMap produced this report, *Shifting Power*, for other movement organizations, capacity-builders and funders to share lessons and insight on the following questions:

Who Leads and Why Does it Matter?

The missions of social justice organizations speak to building power in marginalized communities to transform inequity and injustice. But unless we critically examine who leads and how power is used internally—incorporating an understanding of the impact of oppression at the individual, interpersonal, cultural *and* institutional levels—we run the risk of replicating those same systems inside our organizations. This, in turn, creates unhealthy dynamics that can erode relationships, impact sustainability and hinder our effectiveness externally. MUA's work to confront and interrupt these dynamics provides a strong example and rationale for internally-focused capacity-building to transform leadership structure and practice. Based on this experiment and years of experience, we believe that internal practice is inextricably linked with external effectiveness; **that a group's work to intentionally build pathways from their base to strategic organizational leadership will lead to increased sustainability, alignment with purpose** and values, and more powerful impact.

What Does it Take to Shift Power from the Inside Out?

To effect systemic change and meaningful power-sharing throughout the organization, Futuro Fuerte was designed with a transformational approach that required organization-wide engagement. The consultant team looked for ways to create change in each of the three domains of organizational life—hearts and minds, behavior, and systems/structure—and to support mutually reinforcing shifts in a continual cycle. Toward those ends, Futuro Fuerte implemented a multidimensional methodology, building on teachings and practice using three core modalities: training and tools for all staff, small group clinics for peer learning, and individualized coaching. For meaningful integration of anti-oppression principles and lasting shifts in internal power dynamics, a racial justice and equity-centered framework guided all aspects of the Futuro Fuerte process.

What Does Success Look Like?

Over a three-year period, Futuro Fuerte succeeded in creating shifts within MUA on multiple levels:

- » **Building pathways from member to staff to organizational leader:** MUA is growing new leadership with additional members hired into staff positions and existing staff from the base taking on new roles with increased responsibilities. One

⁴ <http://roadmapconsulting.org/>

significant shift is the promotion of a long time member and co-director into the role of Executive Director in 2017

- » **Deepening leadership and ownership of positional power:** Women already in positions of leadership are fully stepping into supervisory responsibilities and becoming strong mentors to newer staff, inspiring others to see their own power and potential.
- » **Shifting relationships to power and privilege:** Futuro Fuerte opened new lines of communication and understanding across differences of class, education, race and immigration status, and supported healthy power-sharing dynamics.
- » **Linking internal practice to movement impact:** Immigrant women staff leaders are increasingly present in leadership roles outside the organization, transforming MUA's alliances and shaping strategy in the broader movement.
- » **Laying the foundation for a smooth executive transition:** When power and information isn't concentrated exclusively at the top, it is easier for organizations to manage leadership transitions. When MUA's Co-Director (a non-immigrant white ally) began planning her transition off the team after 14 years, the Futuro Fuerte tools already in place generated a collective process for preparing for change, involving immigrant women on the staff and Board from the start.

Shifting Power shares concrete examples and perspectives from staff at all levels of the organization on the impact of Futuro Fuerte, and highlights leadership journeys of four MUA staff members to illustrate the shifts in more detail.

What Are Key Implications for the Field?

For organizations working to integrate member leadership at all levels, lessons from Futuro Fuerte offer several key takeaways:

Shifting power from the inside out is a transformation that requires organization-wide commitment and support from partners, funders and allies; deep investment of time and resources; and customized capacity-building support and internal agents of change to ensure ongoing integration of member leadership across the organization. With this report, RoadMap also offers to the field a new framework on the evolution from member-based to member-led organizational structure, culture and practice, with examples of levers of change and specific benchmarks, steps and support needed along the way.

Shifting Power seeks to situate MUA's example within the context of a broader movement, offering lessons, perspectives and questions for continued exploration by other movement leaders, funders and capacity-builders who are committed to supporting transformative change for equity and justice in our organizations, our alliances, our society as a whole.

Just as this work is ongoing within MUA, we hope this report will be an opening to continued dialogue and a rich sharing of ideas and inspiration.

From MEMBER-BASED to MEMBER-LED

Lessons and Levers for Organization-Wide Transformation

VISION & CORE VALUES

PARTICIPATION & LEADERSHIP

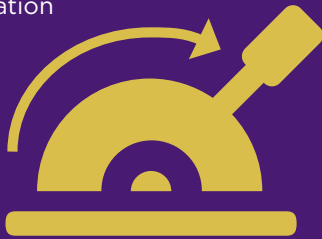
Defining Characteristics of MEMBER-BASED Organizations

- Members' perspectives are prioritized in identifying problems and implementing solutions.
- Experiences of those most impacted by organization's political goals are explicitly valued.

- Ongoing base-building is a core strategy; Growing the number and responsibility of leaders involved in campaigns and program work is an explicit goal and measure of success.
- There are established, resourced and sustained member recruitment, orientation and leadership development practices.
- Paid staff provide campaign and program work leadership, including strategy design and delegation of tasks and roles.

Key Levers of Change

- Commit to foster open discussions on reasons to become member-led.
- Apply an equity lens (race, class, gender, immigration status, etc.) to clarify how power and privilege are systematically playing out.
- Agree on concrete changes and how they relate to the core purpose of organization.
- Commit to raise, invest, and dedicate resources and time to the transformation process.



- Examine existing barriers to participation; develop and implement policies related to language/bilingualism, childcare and other practices to increase inclusiveness.
- Identify skills necessary for members to contribute to campaign and program strategy and incorporate these into leadership development efforts.
- Examine roles and notice conscious and unconscious power dynamics and “tokenism” in the organization: Are members assigned manual or support jobs, while paid staff are thinking and planning?
- Existing paid staff consciously make space for member-leaders and staff from the base to take on new roles; support is put in place to ensure success.
- Slow down enough to make meaningful shifts in how campaigns and programs are planned, designed and carried out.

Defining Characteristics of MEMBER-LED Organizations

- Commitment to being member-led is explicitly defined and stated in vision, mission and values; embraced organization-wide.
- Equity is proactively defined and valued. For example, lived experience is as equally valued as formal education.
- Anti-oppression values are explicitly expressed and supported in external and internal practice.

- Base-building is seen not only as critical to growing community power and leadership for external campaign work, but also as integrally connected to building leadership internally.
- Members are provided with intentional opportunities for growth; positions with increasing responsibility are explicitly open to members from the base and professional development support is in place.
- Member-leaders and staff from the base are integrally engaged in campaign and program work—from on-the-ground work to externally visible leadership (media, public-facing organizing efforts, etc.) to leading strategy development.

Grounded in lessons from MUA's Futuro Fuerte initiative and years of experience in other social justice organizations, RoadMap offers this chart as a starting place. Our rubric makes a distinction between member-based and member-led organizations—as an evolving framework to support discussion about how movement organizations can expand leadership and participation of impacted communities.

DECISION-MAKING

- Members are consulted and sometimes have a voting role in determining priorities.
- Paid staff make most decisions about programs, and the ongoing work; members are sometimes consulted.



STAFF & BOARD COMPOSITION

- Members may have short-term internships or stipend program positions, but few, if any, members are paid staff.
- Board is primarily composed of allies and other stakeholders. It may include a member or two, but representation from the base may feel symbolic. Board continues to function status quo without significant effort to incorporate community members.

- Examine decision-making at all levels (for internal and external work) and create clear principles and practices about inclusion, participation and power-sharing.
- College educated/US-born/white staff commit to sharing power and are supported to shift the ways they use their power and privilege.
- Member-leaders and staff from the base own authentic power and challenge internalized oppression that may hinder their ability to step up.
- Define decision-making responsibilities and lines of accountability for members, staff and board, with commitment to integrate maximum appropriate involvement from membership.



- Make explicit goal of members becoming staff; create timeline and plan to shift internal structure.
- Examine and challenge standard hiring practices. Are formal educational requirements always necessary for professional roles?
- Actively recruit members to open staff positions; assess needs and create conditions to maximize success, including clear roles and adequate support from supervisor.
- Integrate professional development with members' leadership development to ensure that more leaders from the base have skills to enter staff roles.
- Provide coaching, training, and other support for staff hired from the base so they build strategic leadership skills for director-level roles.
- Continually monitor how power is shared in the organization through a racial-justice and equity lens.
- Make explicit goal of grassroots members joining board of directors, including plans for recruitment, selection and orientation.
- Provide relevant, customized training and support for grassroots members to become effective board leaders able to take on fiscal, fundraising and policy obligations.

- Member-leaders and former members in staff positions lead political and strategic decision-making with broad participation from members of the base.
- Members make decisions on all issues that impact them and provide feedback to staff on other issues at the organizational level.



- 50% or more of the paid staff are former members; former members occupy key/high level positions (director level).
- 50% or more of board of directors are from the base; all are fully supported and integrated as active, engaged, contributing members.





MUJERES UNIDAS Y ACTIVAS

Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA) is a grassroots organization of Latina immigrant women with a dual mission of promoting personal transformation and building community power for social and economic justice. A local organization rooted in the San Francisco Bay Area, MUA also engages in statewide and national advocacy work for immigrant rights, women's rights, and workers' rights. MUA is the anchor organization and fiscal sponsor of the California Domestic Worker Coalition, and a co-founder of the National Domestic Worker Alliance.

www.mujeresunidas.net



RoadMap's mission is to strengthen social justice organizations and the social justice sector through capacity-building, peer learning and field-building.



The Beacon Project: *Lighting a Path to Organizational Resiliency* designed to build a cadre of trained leaders who are empowered within their institutions or alliances to be catalysts for sustained change and organizational wellbeing

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