ALL DUE RESPECT

Building Strong Organizations by Creating Fair Labor Standards for Organizers

April 2022

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Acknowledgment and thanks

This report was compiled by All Due Respect, a project that aims to set new labor standards for the social justice movement and to make sure that community organizers get a fair wage and a fair shake—because supporting social justice means supporting the people on the frontlines.

All Due Respect's team is led by Co-Directors Alicia Jay and Kevin Simowitz.

Many thanks to our research team, without whom this report would not be possible:

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- Research Action Design (RAD)

And thank you to our Research Review Board for their input and guidance:

- Sarita Gupta, Ford Foundation
- Arisha Hatch, Color of Change
- Kalpana Krishnamurthy, Forward Together
- Gara LaMarche, Leadership Center for Democracy and Social Justice at CUNY
- Judith LeBlanc, Native Organizers Alliance
- Andrea Mercado, Florida New Majority
- Michelle Miller, Coworker.org
- Supriya Lopez Pillai, Hidden Leaf Foundation
- Art Reyes, We the People Michigan
- Nsé Ufot, New Georgia Project
- Calvin Williams, Movement Strategy Center

Special gratitude to all of the organizers, directors, and funders who participated in the research phase of this project.

All Due Respect is a fiscally-sponsored project of the Hopewell Fund, a registered 501(c)3 non-profit.

Thank you to our funders for their generous support and thoughtful partnership:

Ford Foundation

Open Society Foundations

Rural Democracy Initiative

The California Endowment

Letter from the Co-Directors

We started All Due Respect knowing that we were joining a small but growing cadre of organizers consciously attempting to improve labor standards within the profession, as a way to care for one another and build stronger, more sustainable organizations—and, therefore, more effective movements.

We seek solutions. Implementable, innovative, and practical interventions that actually change the material conditions under which community organizers are doing their work. We want organizers to be acknowledged as the irreplaceable, skilled workers they are. We want wages to be raised, benefits to be provided, and transparent policies put in place to support the livelihoods and career sustainability of organizers. We believe that organizers, directors of organizations, and funders all have a key role to play in making these changes a reality.

We especially want to thank and acknowledge the National Organizers Alliance for their groundbreaking leadership in this space. We wish we didn't have to work on this project! It can be dispiriting to read NOA reports from two decades ago that outline the same sort of problems in the organizing workplace that we found in this report. But where others just see problems, organizers identify issues, and bring people together to make a plan for what can be done. We're grateful to the hundreds of organizers who paved the way, to the ones who helped us out as we built All Due Respect, and to the ones yet to come. We hope that when you get here, organizing feels a little more like the workplace you deserve.

Our hope was that All Due Respect would be focused on solutions, contributing to the movement by helping to catalyze a set of possible interventions rooted in this research. This report is being written at an exciting point in the trajectory of our project. As we move from interviews and surveys to pilot projects in the field, we hope you will consider all of this work as a living document, and always with room for more people and ideas that build toward a stronger organizing movement.

Onwards,

Alicia Jay

Kevin Simowitz

For more information and to get involved, contact us here or by emailing kevin@allduerespectproject.org.

Executive Summary

All Due Respect works with organizers, executive directors, and philanthropy to improve working conditions and set new movement standards. We believe that respect, security, and transparency are fundamental to organizing for social change and that all organizers deserve it. But how do we get there?

In the fall of 2020, All Due Respect began an intensive, year-long research process, during which we surveyed and interviewed more than 200 organizers, executive directors, and funders to understand the state of our sector. What we found was a movement that was out of alignment—organizers burned out and contemplating leaving organizing work altogether; executive directors struggling to hire and retain organizers; and funders beginning to recognize their responsibility to ensure that the organizations they fund uphold a basic set of standards, but unsure how to communicate that responsibility.

These are not just individual challenges for individual organizers, or even organization-specific problems—movement-wide, we have a labor standards problem that directly contributes to the lack of efficacy in our organizing campaigns.

Ten key takeaways emerged from our research:

1. The vast majority of organizers—nine out of ten—have experienced burnout.
2. Organizers believe that working conditions need to be improved.
3. Organizers believe that their working conditions have a direct impact on campaign success as well as on the effectiveness of the broader movement ecosystem.
4. We cannot take for granted that people want to do these jobs, or that there will always be a steady stream of interested and available staff.
5. Directors don't have the resources they need to pay more competitive salaries and build staff capacity.
6. It is difficult to find, hire, and retain trained organizers, especially organizers who come from or represent the communities they are working with.
7. Directors don't have access to centralized information about wages, benefits, and best management practices on how to create and maintain sustainable jobs.
8. There is a set of funders who understand the need to shift how they fund and support organizing, and who understand there is a disconnect between how we value organizing and how we actually treat organizers.
9. Funders have a critical role to play in improving labor standards for organizers—but it must happen in partnership with organizations.
10. Funders and the broader philanthropic sector should view the current challenges organizations are experiencing with retention and burnout as a crisis that necessitates a response—and shift how they operate.

The goal of All Due Respect is to work with our partners—organizers, grassroots community groups, and funders—to set new labor standards and make sure that community organizers get a fair wage and a fair shake—because **supporting social justice means supporting the people on the frontlines.** To that end, we propose a series of interventions that we believe will help ensure that:

- Employees are supported in their jobs;
- Organizations have the resources to build their teams for the long haul; and
- Funders know they're investing in organizations that practice what they preach, and that have the staff (both in numbers and experience) they need to win campaigns.

These possible interventions include, but are not limited to: a guidebook of standard working conditions; "Good Jobs" employer certification; training and resources focused on recruitment and retention of BIPOC organizers; further exploration of the role unionization plays in creating higher quality jobs for organizers; guidelines for fiscal sponsors and philanthropy-serving organizations (PSOs); and pooled funds to better support organizational efforts to hire and retain organizers. (To read more about these ideas, please see the "Interventions" section of the report.)

Success for us means securing a future in which organizers—especially organizers who come from or represent the communities they are working with—are valued and supported as the foundation and the future of the progressive movement. The people who are working day in and day out to build power and win big fights should be paid sustainable wages, receive good benefits, and work in a culture that holistically supports their livelihoods. Organizers shouldn't burn out after a few years, and they shouldn't have to make impossible choices about their futures and their families because they can't support themselves.

If we believe that organizing is truly important to our collective success, then it's time to collectively create a future that values organizers.

Introduction: Meeting the Moment

"Most organizers I know do the work they do because they are, first, passionate about an issue and want to make an impact. However, when organizers have to contend with poor work conditions, it can be demoralizing and sow seeds of doubt about their efforts—and that in turn can impact the energy they can put forth toward any given campaign." [1]

"We need people with decades of experience who know what they're doing and can innovate and mentor others. But what smart, talented professional is going to take or keep a poorly paid, workaholic job as an organizer for more than a few years?"

Organizers spend their days fighting for a better future. The organizations they work for are committed, at least on paper, to the values of transparency, equity, and justice. And the funders investing in these organizations are ostensibly seeking the highest levels of impact and change. Taken together, the progressive movement is working toward a vision of the future where all people are treated with dignity and have access to the supports they need to live a full, healthy, and engaged life.

And yet, all too often, there is a disconnect between the values that many organizations purport to stand for and the way their staff experience their jobs. There is a deep structural problem within the progressive movement: the organizers we rely on to build and engage our base are often barely making ends meet. By and large, organizers are underpaid, overworked, and at times, under-appreciated. They may even be told that impossibly long hours and insecure futures are inherent qualities of social justice work, and of organizing in particular. This expectation of martyrdom has especially damaging consequences for a set of organizers—women, Black, Indigenous, people of color, LGBTQ+,[2] disabled, young people, and other marginalized workers from the communities we are organizing—who are expected to do the work regardless of how they're being treated, and who are expected to care about their communities more than they care about their own self-preservation.

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1 Note: All pull quotes in the report come from either survey respondents or from interviews conducted during the research phase, and to maintain the privacy of all individuals, we are keeping them anonymous throughout the report.

2 While few studies exist on LGBTQ+ workers in the nonprofit sector, a 2020 study by ReproJobs found that LGBTQ+ respondents made less on average than their non-LGBTQ+ peers, and in particular, transgender and non-binary staff were paid significantly lower salaries. For more, see: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e3df529e62a4b505407594a/t/5f281cbdb416162a137f7f50/1596464318633/ReproJobs-BitchBetterHaveMyMoney-report-2020.pdf.

The impact of poor working conditions for organizers extends far beyond individual consequences—there are severe systemic consequences as well. This trend has significant ramifications on the lives of individual organizers, the organizations they represent, those funding these organizations, the broader progressive ecosystem, and ultimately, on our movement's ability to win campaigns and effect lasting change. If it is true that we cannot win without organizers, and that organizers are the "backbone of the movement," then we have some chronic back pain issues. Organizers are vital to the movement landscape—and our treatment of organizers and their work must match their importance.

While many organizations and some funders are beginning to recognize that something needs to change, and are taking concrete steps to address the working conditions of organizers, as a whole, organizations and funders have yet to collectively address this critical—and solvable—problem.

At All Due Respect, we believe that our own movement's labor practices are holding all of us back—and that a new set of sector-wide labor standards is needed in order for organizers, and by extension, our organizations and campaigns, to thrive. There are solutions—ones that can and should be anchored and enforced by funders, executive directors, and organizers. We recognize that there is no one silver bullet that can end the churn and burn of organizers; major cultural shifts must occur with our organizations and movements. But there are concrete, structural interventions we can implement to begin to address the working conditions of organizers, and they can point us to a new way forward.

We recognize that organizing is always going to be a difficult job, and that much of what makes organizing so challenging is inherent to the work. Organizers are asked to be relationship builders, project managers, event planners, curriculum developers, and more. It is a job that requires irregular hours, being 'on call' during big campaign pushes, travel, flexibility, and patience. Organizers wear many hats, and are expected to do it all while building deep and lasting connections with their members. This makes it all the more important to change the working conditions that we actually do have the power to improve, such as wages, benefits, and organizational management practices. Organizing ourselves internally around our values is nothing new, and naming those shared values is an essential component of our ongoing work to recognize and acknowledge what unites us. Externally, we fight for individuals to experience dignity at work, structural supports in corporations and institutions, and rigorous training standards to transform jobs into careers, but internally, many organizations fall short of those ideals, as evidenced by the lack of sustainable wages, the long-standing culture of martyrdom, and the lack of training for organizers as they advance in their responsibilities.

The ways that organizations are funded have played an outsized role in creating these unsustainable conditions. Often, organizations, and in particular smaller organizations, simply do not have sufficient resources to dramatically raise organizer pay overnight, even if they have the desire to do so. We recognize that it will take a commitment from all stakeholders—organizers, directors of organizations, and funders—to disrupt these harmful practices. We cannot continue to accept a status quo that tolerates a set of unfair practices internally while attempting to change those same practices in the outside world. In particular, we believe funders have a responsibility to use their positional power to ensure their grantee partners are upholding fair labor standards in a supportive, not punitive, way,

which will require a commitment from funders to supporting directors and organizations to fully live up to their values.

These challenges have particular impacts on organizers from communities disproportionately impacted by structural inequality and racist policies, and who do not have generational wealth to fall back on to supplement their salaries. Organizers are on the frontlines of working for change under increasingly difficult and at times violent conditions, yet are barely able to support themselves and their families or take the time to recharge. Failure to acknowledge the personal demands faced by organizers, particularly by Black leaders, women of color, and other marginalized organizers, without fair compensation and other equitable practices to be able to care for themselves and their families, is a tremendous oversight. The consequences of undervaluing people is quite literally a life-or-death matter, as tragically evidenced in multiple stories of organizers taking their own lives or dying as a result of stress-based illness.[3]

At All Due Respect, we focus on the working conditions of organizers because no base building organization or campaign can succeed without strong organizing. Organizers are the ones engaged in the day-to-day work of building people power—conducting outreach, working with members, and building campaigns from the bottom up. Yet too often, they are some of the lowest-paid staffers at their workplace, with little transparency into organizational management and operations, and are given little decision-making authority despite their work being at the heart of any organization. In particular, we focus on organizers working at local and state-wide organizations and in local elections, rather than national organizations or campaigns. This focus is two-fold: not only is it that these organizations and campaigns are the ones building the power our movement needs on the ground, it is also the case, more often than not, that local and state-based organizations struggle to pay competitive wages and provide benefits to their staff, as compared to national groups.

"Good organizing makes or breaks most campaigns. But it's always the last funded, least consulted, least important [role], after fundraising, media, communications, social media, and digital considerations."

3 See: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/26/us/they-push-they-protest-and-many-activists-privately-suffer-as-a-result.html

Shared definitions

Note: These are meant to be helpful guideposts rather than industry-redefining terms.

Organizing: Building a base of people, especially those most impacted by unjust policies, practices, and undemocratic power structures, to take collective action and to build values-based power that challenges imbalanced power relationships and the damaging and disparate consequences they create.

Organizer: Someone who is engaged in the day-to-day work of base building, bringing people together to exert collective power and take collective action.

Working conditions: In addition to wages, benefits, and other typical workplace policies, working conditions also include: the nature of the relationship between management and the rest of staff, decision-making structures and roles, and dynamics of power and privilege along the axes of race, gender, sexuality, disability, and more.

The events of the past several years—massive protests in support of Black liberation, a resurgent and emboldened far-right, and a pandemic that has both illuminated and deepened existing inequalities along the faultlines of race, class, and gender—make it all the more timely and urgent for us as a movement to address how we are collectively failing organizers. Crucially, our shared values demand it; equally as crucial, in order to meet the urgency of the moment and the multiple interlocked crises of our time, we cannot continue to have experienced organizers burn out and leave not only their organizations, but the progressive movement entirely.

It is past time for all of us to do better, and to begin, as the National Organizers Alliance put it in their 2001 report,[4] for all of us to practice what we preach. And we believe that those with more institutional power—organizational leadership and funders—have a duty to live up to the values we all hold: sustainability, care, and valuing not just people's labor, but all aspects of their lives. In particular, funders and the broader philanthropic world, given their positional power and influence, must be engaged in co-creating new models of support for organizers and organizations,[5] and have a critical role to play in partnering with organizational leaders and organizers to normalize and incentivize equitable labor practices.

But how do we get there?

4 See: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xn6gfB58YGo5ceRRD3VidQzjCPCiMLoW/view?usp=sharing

5 The report "Power Moves: Your essential philanthropy assessment guide for equity and justice" by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy offers a useful roadmap for how foundations and funders should think of their positional power: http://www.ncrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Power-Moves-Philanthropy.pdf

All Due Respect is guided by one overarching question: What would it take to create a new set of labor standards for organizers?

The need to improve labor standards and working conditions for organizers is neither new nor revelatory. Indeed, many people have tried to create good working conditions for organizers, and All Due Respect is building off of the work that has come before as well as existing efforts to create sustainable organizing and non-profit jobs. We are deeply indebted to the work of the aforementioned National Organizers Alliance, and see our efforts as building off of and updating NOA's work to meet today's challenges. In addition, a growing number of technical assistance providers are beginning to work on solutions to help streamline human resources systems across organizations and create shared back-end services, with the goal of pooling costs among organizations. We are also inspired by the wave of unionization efforts by a new generation of workers—what some have dubbed as "Gen U"[6]—at non-profits,[7] advocacy groups, political campaigns,[8] digital news outlets,[9] and corporate behemoths such as Starbucks and Amazon,[10] which speaks to a clear desire on the part of young workers for fair wages, benefits, and a voice at their workplace. This growing interest in unionization has, unsurprisingly, also spread to the organizing sector, where organizers and other staff in an increasing number of organizations have begun to pursue forming unions. (For more on the impact of unionization efforts and their potential to transform working conditions for organizers, see "What We've Learned: Unionization.")

This report summarizes Phase One of the work of All Due Respect, which focused on two key areas:

1) An intensive, year-long research process we undertook to gain data, both quantitative and qualitative, on the state of organizing jobs, and the challenges that all stakeholders face in improving the quality of those jobs.
2) A proposal for potential interventions that All Due Respect will be piloting, based on our research and a survey of best practices, that, if implemented, would help realize a new set of movement-wide labor standards.

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6 See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/03/04/starbucks-employees-unionizing
7 See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/02/04/workers-are-forming-unions-nonprofits-thinktanks-their-bosses-arent-always-happy
8 See: https://www.businessinsider.com/democratic-political-campaign-staff-unionizing-2022-midterms-elections-dnc-2021-12
9 See: https://niemanreports.org/articles/newsrooms-labor-unions
10 See: https://www.npr.org/2022/02/17/1080689396/amazon-labor-push-escalates-as-workers-at-new-york-warehouse-win-a-union-vote

What We Set Out to Discover

Our research focused on answering the following questions:

- What is the current state of organizing jobs?
- What are the current working conditions of organizers?
- How do these working conditions affect organizational impact as well as movement impact?
- How are directors currently thinking about the state of working conditions for organizers? What is their role in changing conditions? What are the dynamics involved in these decisions?
- What is the role of funders and philanthropy in working conditions for organizers? What is their current involvement? What could or should it be?
- How have unionization efforts impacted both conversations and actual outcomes of working conditions for organizers?
- How does the culture surrounding organizing impact potential interventions?
- How are organizers viewed within the broader movement?
- How are organizers viewed within organizational culture?

Methodology

From the fall of 2021 to February 2022, All Due Respect's research team conducted both quantitative and qualitative research on the current state of the field, focusing on gathering data from and interviewing organizers, directors, and funders:

- Organizer data: We surveyed 168 organizers from 32 states and Washington, D.C.,
- on their working conditions (see Appendix, "All Due Respect Organizer Survey" for a copy of the survey) and conducted in-depth interviews with 25 organizers to better understand how those working conditions affected their lives, as well as the success of their organizations and the broader movement. All Due Respect shared the survey on listservs geared towards reaching organizers, on social media channels, and with personal networks; in addition, organizers and movement allies shared the survey with their own networks.
- Director data: We conducted in-depth interviews with 16 executive directors at a range of organizations in twelve states, including local grassroots organizations, state-level multi-issue organizing groups, and union locals.
- Funder data: We conducted in-depth interviews with seven program officers at foundations that currently fund community organizing efforts.

In addition, All Due Respect undertook a research scan to identify existing literature, studies, research, and reporting on the quality and sustainability of social justice organizing jobs. We sought more information on what projects had been undertaken in recent years, where gaps in research still remain, and what solutions have been proposed and implemented.

Our findings from the literature review:

- While much has been studied about the nonprofit sector writ large, including the quality of jobs for a wide swath of staffers, very little exists about the specific jobs of social justice organizers, especially with regards to how the quality of those jobs impact campaign and movement outcomes.
- Research shows that while funders have conducted and invested in many studies about leadership in the nonprofit sector, the concluding recommendations remain just that--recommendations. By and large, the solutions proposed by researchers to address inequities in the social justice movement's hiring practices and workplace standards have either been too vague to enact or have failed to locate responsibility for change with both funders and organizations. For change to take hold, solutions need to be built with all parties in the conversation at the outset, and with a commitment to action steps that reflect the complex power relationships between organizations and funders.
- The existing research does not fully connect the dots between the structural changes required within organizations (pay, benefits, etc.) and the cultural shifts (such as management practices, transparency, decision-making approach, and discriminatory behavior) needed to move away from a spirit of assumed martyrdom towards one where organizers are more deeply valued and respected for their work.
- Recent and widespread nonprofit unionization efforts demonstrate the urgency of the need, but those efforts also demonstrate how unionization is one part—a key one, but not the only one—of addressing challenges within the organizing profession.

Based on our review of existing studies, literature, and reports, there is little that specifically focuses on the community organizing sector. At All Due Respect, we believe our work is an important contribution and addition to existing research.

A note on confidentiality: In order to maintain the privacy of each individual, we have omitted people's names, the names of their organizations, and any other identifying details.

Our Findings: Out of Alignment

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: ORGANIZERS

"I think consistent failures of leadership, lack of recognition, and poor compensation drive people to quit organizations, which will hurt their reputation and capacity."

"If I was being paid more, I would feel better. I still want to keep doing something I love. I don't necessarily want to sell out in order to survive."

"I've seen plenty of people just get burned out and leave. And I'm glad they're happier, but I know that they were also good organizers, and people that I wish could have stayed in the movement."

People do not become organizers as a get-rich-quick scheme—they become organizers because they are deeply invested in building a more just and equitable world. As one organizer we interviewed stated, "I fall in love with the people in the fight. It's pure." Organizers and their critical work are the backbone of our movements—without them, change would not be possible.

Yet as became clear in our research, our back hurts, and is in deep need of realignment. There is a major disconnect between the value we place on organizing and the way we treat organizers, and organizers are too often talked about as heroes and then treated as replaceable cogs in the machine. Our current organizing model fails to recruit and retain the best staff, fails to achieve the best possible campaign outcomes, and fails to address the gender and racial injustice inherent in all systems of power, including community organizing groups. These poor working conditions have practical consequences not just for individual organizations and campaigns, but help to create a larger culture within the movement—what is widely accepted, after all, becomes a norm that is difficult for any one organization to shift.

But these failures also have moral consequences—what does it say about social justice movements when we fail to live up to our own values and standards?

Equally pernicious is the attitude swirling in and around grassroots organizations about the idea of turning organizing into a career. A majority of the current leadership grew up,

professionally speaking, in a culture that viewed organizing (when it viewed it at all) with little regard, and eeking out a living was about the best any organizer could hope for. The history of community organizing is stained with a troubling approach to race and gender and other marginalized identities; at best, organizations ignored the realities of oppressive systems, and at worst, organizations willingly perpetuated them. These perspectives and practices created a legacy of barriers for many organizers, including those who were underpaid and couldn't afford to forgo a liveable paycheck, for people of color who needed different types of support to succeed as staff and who lacked pathways to organizational leadership, and for parents and caregivers who were forced to choose between their roles at work and at home.

As recognition for the necessity of organizing as a key part of social change has grown—and as the funding landscape has shifted in kind—it is now possible for someone to turn organizing into a career with wages, benefits, and professional development opportunities that expand over time. Unfortunately, organizers are too often met with resistance instead of enthusiasm when they inquire about or attempt to create a sustainable and purpose-driven career path for themselves.

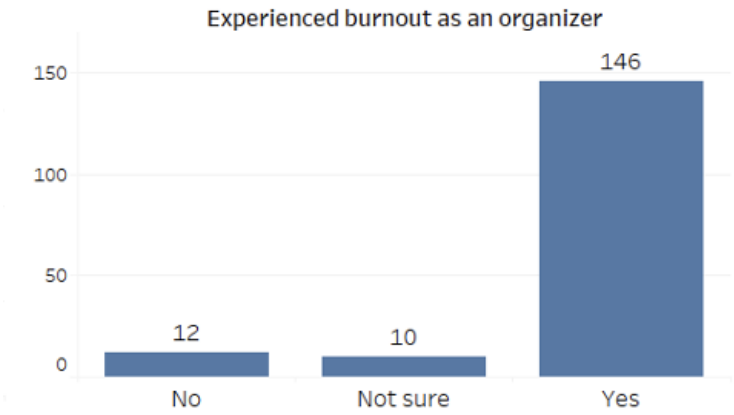
We depend on organizers to win—and it's past time to put our money where our mouth is.

Key takeaway #1: The vast majority of organizers—nine out of ten—have experienced burnout.

a. There is not one single factor that leads to burnout.
b. Some of the factors that lead to stress and burnout are outside of the control of organizations and their leadership and stem from the inherently challenging nature of organizing work.
c. Organizers identified a suite of poor working conditions that led to burnout—and fixing these conditions will require both structural interventions as well as a shift in both organizational and movement-wide culture.
d. The impact of burnout is especially acute for women of color, queer people, immigrants, working-class organizers, and organizers with disabilities.

Almost nine out of ten of the organizers we surveyed said they have experienced burnout on the job.

Some of the factors that lead to stress and contribute to burnout are outside of the control of the organization and its leadership. In our one-on-one interviews, several organizers identified that the inherent nature of organizing work—working with members who are dealing with very real and at times traumatic situations, the emotional stress of feeling like they need to win and make a lasting and real impact, and working to transform an often violent, white supremacist system—has impacted their mental health and contributed to burnout.



"Burnout will lead to situations where organizers are not performing well due to work stress. That then bleeds over into their personal lives, meaning they have little chance to recharge in order to do the work they need to do in an efficient amount of time. Overworking just leads to the same amount of work being done worse and over a longer period of time."

As several noted, the stakes of their work are high, which can lead to heightened levels of stress. One organizer noted that if a bill they are pushing through the legislature doesn't pass, "people will die or stay in jail." They added, "If I feel like I'm slacking or something, then I'm like, oh yeah, people's lives really depend on this." Another organizer, who works with low-wage workers, said that the pressure of their work "can be exhausting and scary." They continued: "You're like, oh shit, am I responsible for 300 people's jobs?"

In particular, BIPOC organizers and others from marginalized communities expressed that the conditions under which they work has serious impacts on their mental health. As a state-based voting rights organizer put it, "Sometimes this work can be incredibly traumatic." BIPOC organizers, they noted, deal with particular threats of violence and intimidation due to the nature of their work and who they are—and all the more so in recent years, under a previous administration that stoked racist violence and emboldened the far-right. "I know so many people who dealt either directly or indirectly with threats, either to them or to the organization," they said. **"**A lot of them are race-based, because we always work under the veil of white supremacy."

In addition, organizers are often the staff working most closely with an organization's membership, and several organizers shared that this work can at times be emotionally difficult. "There's grief when someone gets shot in your membership or someone gets deported or what have you," one organizer said. They continued: "I really think that for organizers, there is not enough acknowledgement of the emotional labor that organizers have to deal with. As an organizer, you're talking to community members that are having a crisis, like people that are getting evicted. That's another role that is not acknowledged as an organizer. We become social workers, period."

Burnout

Burnout goes beyond just everyday stress. Increasingly, it is being recognized as a serious workplace issue that bleeds into all aspects of someone's life, with deeply negative consequences. The World Health Organization defines burnout[11] as "a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed," which is characterized by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
- reduced professional efficacy.

As one expert put it, "Burnout is different from depression in that it is tied specifically to our work and our relationship with our work."[12]

11 See: https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases

12 See: https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/05/28/727637944/who-redefines-burnout-as-a-syndrome-linked-to-chronic-stress-at-work

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing feelings of burnout. As one organizer told us in an interview, due to the pandemic, "I don't have anything in me left. I'm tired, I'm depressed, I'm exhausted. I just need to sleep. But I also need to pay my bills. So that's why I stay at work." Another organizer expressed a belief that, much like millions of other workers in what has been dubbed the "Great Resignation," organizers are also reassessing their relationships to work. "People were slowed down or were forced to not work at a certain level or change the way that they worked. And I feel like that [contributed] to a whole reassessment of what people thought working conditions could be or what they wanted from working conditions," they said.

It's important to recognize that these conditions that organizers operate under cannot be easily changed—in fact, they are often the reason why organizing is so needed. Organizing is difficult, challenging work—which makes it all the more necessary for us to transform the aspects of organizing jobs that can be changed.

As evidenced by our survey results and echoed during the interviews we conducted, many organizers we spoke with also identified poor working conditions that lead to burnout. These conditions, according to the survey's open-ended questions as well as our one-on-one interviews, include:

- Low and/or unsustainable wages;
- Lack of training and support;
- A culture of martyrdom, exacerbated by low staff capacity, that leads to poor work/life balance and an inability to take the necessary time off to recharge; and
- Lack of decision-making authority and respect from top leadership.

Working conditions vary by organization. According to our survey, not all organizers experience all or any of these working conditions and are dissatisfied with their jobs. Seven out of ten respondents stated they were either "mostly satisfied" or "completely satisfied" with their jobs—but for the three out of ten who expressed dissatisfaction, all but one survey respondent reported they had experienced burnout and more than nine out of ten have considered leaving paid organizing work. And even those who expressed satisfaction have experienced burnout and believe that both structural changes and cultural shifts need to occur—out of this group, three out of four have contemplated leaving paid organizing and more than eight out of ten shared they have experienced burnout. According to our survey data, these results are relatively uniform for organizers of all races, pointing to a deep need and desire for change throughout our sector; we also see value in deeper survey research specifically within BIPOC communities. Poor working conditions, and specifically the lack of good wages and benefits, will always have disproportionate effects for organizers entering the field without the benefit of personal or familial wealth to draw upon. Low pay scales and substandard benefits are often a contributing factor to BIPOC organizers leaving the work,[13] and we strongly suspect that they also play a role in preventing many would-be organizers from even considering applying for organizing jobs.

13 While dated, a survey from the mid-1990s of a union organizer recruitment program in which half of the participants were white and half were people of color found that white organizers were retained at a much higher rate—63 percent of the participants who stayed were white and 37 percent were people of color. For more, see: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277539514000971?via%3Dihub.

Low and/or unsustainable wages

"I've turned 30, and I make more than I've ever made. And I still can't afford a one-bedroom or studio apartment."

In our survey, more than half of all respondents identified low wages as an issue, and overall, dissatisfied organizers rated their organizations more poorly than satisfied organizers when asked if current wage and benefit policies reflect the organization's stated values. While no full-time staff were being paid poverty wages, many shared that they were not being paid sustainable wages. This echoes findings from the broader nonprofit sector—a 2019 survey of nonprofit workers found that more than half (53 percent) of nonprofit employees did not think their organization's wage standards were fair.[14] According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2020, "community and social service specialists" working for social advocacy organizations had a mean hourly wage of $23.47 and a mean annual wage of $48,820.[15] Importantly, salaries for organizers may be lower than for comparable staff in the broader nonprofit sector; according to a 2012 survey of salaries within social justice organizations, salaries in social justice organizations were lower than salaries in the nonprofit sector overall, and 40 percent did not pay a living wage.[16] As one organizer told us in an interview, they would not have been able to accept their current job (located in a city with a high cost of living) but for the fact that they were living with their partner, and thus able to share the cost of rent. On a similar note, another organizer told us, "I've turned 30, and I make more than I've ever made. And I still can't afford a one-bedroom or studio apartment." Living with roommates as they enter their thirties is one concession, they said, that they have had to make in order to continue to be an organizer. They added, "If I was being paid more, I would feel better. I still want to keep doing something I love. I don't necessarily want to sell out in order to survive."

For many organizers, a lack of transparency by organizational leadership in setting salaries appears related to how satisfied they are with their jobs. For organizers who noted they were dissatisfied with their jobs, more than two out of three said there was no open rationale for pay decisions at their organization; for satisfied organizers, it was one out of three.

All work should be fairly compensated, but relatedly, salary disparities within an organization can lead to organizers feeling devalued. "You see how administrative staff sometimes are still paid more than organizers," one organizer said. "But I feel like you get more of your power from the people you're talking to and who you're building with, yet that's not how it translates in the wages."

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14 See "Staffing the Mission": https://classism.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/CA-StaffingTheMission_Web-Final.pdf.

15 See https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211099.htm#(2)

16 For more, see: https://roadmapconsulting.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/RoadMap_Salary_report.pdf

A culture of martyrdom, exacerbated by low staff capacity, that leads to poor work/life balance and an inability to take the necessary time off to recharge

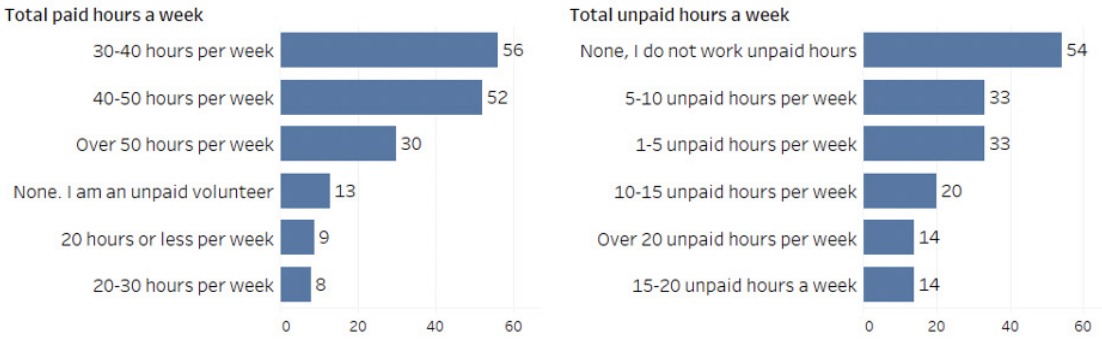
"I don't have time to be sick."

"There's the culture of glamorizing how hard you work and how little sleep you get and how exhausted you are."

A movement culture that reifies overwork and exhaustion as a sign of one's commitment was one significant factor that several interviewees raised. According to our survey results, one out of every three organizers who were dissatisfied with their jobs worked more than 50 hours each week (in contrast, only one of eight satisfied organizers worked more than 50 hours each week). Many organizers shared that the long hours are a combination of the culture of organizations and the organizing community but also reflective of the issues they work on themselves. Several shared that the culture of martyrdom was an expectation that they had internalized, but recognized was ultimately harmful. "There's the culture of glamorizing how hard you work and how little sleep you get and how exhausted you are," one organizer said, which has become "the default expectation." Another organizer echoed those thoughts. "I had to move away from really believing that culture of grinding. As organizers, we take a lot of pride in like, I was up til midnight, or I was at the Capitol until two, one in the morning at the hearing. It's exciting, but I think in the long-term, it's not sustainable for us."

Often, this is a mindset that is promoted by top leadership at the organization—though, as several organizers we interviewed expressed, this is thankfully beginning to change. Several organizers shared that the leadership of their organizations, with the support of certain funders, had begun to provide benefits meant to prioritize the mental health and well-being of their staff. Some of these efforts are being provided as "healing justice" resources, a welcome, burgeoning trend. These initiatives included: paying for mental health and somatic healing services, mandated all-staff quarterly breaks, and stress-prevention packages.

But these benefits are far from the norm, and challenges remain. Half of all survey respondents reported that they work more than 40 hours per week, and almost one out of every five reported that they work more than 50 hours each week. As became clear in our one-on-one interviews, however, it is not simply the total number of hours organizers work that contributes to feeling overworked and burned out. Organizing is not a 9-5 job—working evenings and weekends is common and often unavoidable due to the inherent nature of the work, and during particularly key moments of campaigns, work hours can be well above 50 or even 60 hours each week. As one organizer told us of a campaign that was particularly grueling, "Organizing staff were working ridiculous hours. We were supposed to flex our hours, but again, you realistically couldn't because you always feel responsible. You're on call," they said. They pointed out that this is a situation almost uniquely faced by organizing staff: "The development people or the admin people, they could have a 40-hour work week, but not for organizers. Organizers are working weekends, traveling for conferences, which is exciting. But work-life balance is not realistic for organizers versus the administrative staff."



This makes it all the more important for organizations to prioritize rest for organizers. It was widely acknowledged that due to the challenging nature of organizing work and campaigns, organizers need to have the ability to rest, beyond just a rare three-day weekend. One organizer who has staffed electoral campaigns told us, "You need those breaks. You need to have time to relax. When you're working on campaigns, you need longer extended times in between campaigns, because the work is so intense." Yet almost half of all survey respondents shared that they feel unable to take the necessary time off to rest, recover, and recharge, and more than one-third noted that at their organization, they are discouraged or otherwise hindered in taking time off. At times, this is due to the culture of martyrdom. As one organizer told us, "It makes it hard for people to take breaks. I think a lot of people feel guilty for taking time off because they feel like something's going to pass them by or something will have happened that they could have stopped." At other times, it is poor management that prevents organizers from taking time off. Another organizer shared that at a previous organizing job, a coworker felt forced to quit their job because their manager refused to let them take time off to go see their father who had been in a serious accident. "There's a lot of [people] that are almost too focused on just getting the work done, and not remembering that your organizers are people and workers too," they said.

But crucially, several organizers noted that their workloads are simply too high to take time off. One organizer shared that in the midst of a campaign fighting for paid leave, a loved one was dying from cancer, which reinforced to them the importance of having paid leave for all. Yet despite their organization's generous paid leave policy, they prioritized their work, "because I really felt the pressure" of the "urgent" campaign. "It's so ironic. I am fighting for paid leave and then I feel like I can't take it myself," they said. Another organizer told us a similar story—that they had too much work on their plate to take the time off they needed. "I don't have time to be sick," they said. Even having supportive supervisors who encourage their organizers to take time off sometimes does not solve the challenge. "They tell me to take a break," one organizer said of their supervisors. "But it doesn't take away the fact that the work still needs to get done. And it's never-ending. What is a better way?"

This points to a reality for many of the necessary changes to movement-wide labor standards—beyond just having a policy captured on paper, we also need both the *conditions* for implementation (i.e., more resources and adequate staffing) and a *culture* of implementation. Some of the necessary preconditions for a culture of implementation are sustainable systems. For instance, sustainable systems recognize that people taking time off from work is not only necessary, but a normal part of the workflow of the entire organization, and must be planned for.

But too often, when organizers do take time off, they simply return to more work, as other overburdened organizers aren't able to cover their work while they are away. "People need a rest, but there's nobody cycling in while they're cycling out. There's no way for them to return back after they have that rest period," one organizer said.

Lack of training and support

Several organizers identified a lack of training and support from organizational leadership as a significant challenge. "Organizing is a craft that you need to learn and practice and study. You just don't wake up and be like, okay, I'm an organizer. So I wish there was more time put into our development as organizers, because what I would have done ten years ago versus now is completely different," one organizer said. Another shared that they wished they had the time to read and become an expert on the issues they organized on. "But where do you have time to do that? You kind of just go immediately to the work. What about that extra time to read about the issue, to read some context, to read some articles, to read a study, to read a report? I wish I had a week where my supervisors would just say, this is a reading week."

Without training, it can be difficult to advance within an organization or grow one's skills as an organizer. Many third-party organizer trainings focus on new organizers, and there are few opportunities for more seasoned organizers who wish to advance their skills to receive training and guidance. Relatedly, and cited by more than one respondent to the survey, attempts to "promote" or recognize the growth and leadership of an organizer often equates to increased responsibility without proper compensation or decision-making authority.

At times, organizers find that their supervisors and organizational leadership are unwilling to provide the appropriate and sufficient support they need. The social justice sector is not immune to perpetuating systemic inequities. As one organizer with a disability told us, "Working a lot more hours than 40 in a week while dealing with a disability that requires doctors visits caused some burnout last year. I had to take off more time and recharge, but I feel it creeping up on me again because of my workload and meetings."

Lack of decision-making authority and respect from top leadership

How valued are organizers? Generally, survey respondents shared that they are not only underpaid and overworked—many respondents cited that organizational leadership, both board and executive, did not place adequate value on organizing as essential to strategy and overall success. As one organizer put it, low wages demonstrate that the work is devalued "even though that's where the power is."

Among the survey respondents, there were few who experienced decision-making authority or input on strategy design. This top-down approach is common in social justice organizations, yet it works against the very nature of organizing, which is time-consuming, deeply relational, aims to represent community members, is strategic by design, and develops leaders to train

and carry forward the mission. Many saw this conflict of cultures as counterproductive and actually detrimental to the success of a campaign. The exclusion of organizers in strategy design, as well as the lack of support and care in a workplace can strain relationships in the field, in coalitions, among peers, and ultimately hurt the outcome of a campaign.

In an interview, one organizer shared a recent experience where their knowledge, expertise, and feedback was not valued and taken into account by their organization's leadership in planning an event. Rather than listen to the organizer, who shared that turnout expectations for the event were unrealistic, they ignored their concerns. "I'm like, I don't want you to think that I'm not doing my job, but…I knew that it wouldn't be successful, but that wasn't heard," they said.

Another organizer shared a similar experience. "I've had jobs before where the campaign plan was handed to me and then I was just told to implement it. And I was like, I have a lot of ideas. Sometimes in my career, that was accepted, and other times it was just like, no, you just have to do what I say," they said, adding, "I like jobs where my leadership is trusted."

One organizer who spent several years working on electoral campaigns shared that leadership who refused to take her feedback into account is what led her to ultimately burnout and leave the field of campaign organizing. "I've been in so many positions working in campaigns where, because of the lack of time, the lack of money, the lack of training, whatever it is, you see bad decisions getting made," they said. When they would speak up about what they felt were bad decisions, there would be conflict with their boss. "I'm not somebody who's going to not speak up if there's something that I disagree with at work. In my last couple of jobs, I would just be fighting all day. Every meeting I went into, every call, every time I talked to my boss, it would just be like a constant fight about whatever decision I disagreed with or whatever wasn't being handled well. And it just got so exhausting to do that all day long." They added that due in large part to this experience, "I am definitely not going back into organizing." Giving organizers more control, they said, is "a piece of the puzzle that people really aren't talking about."

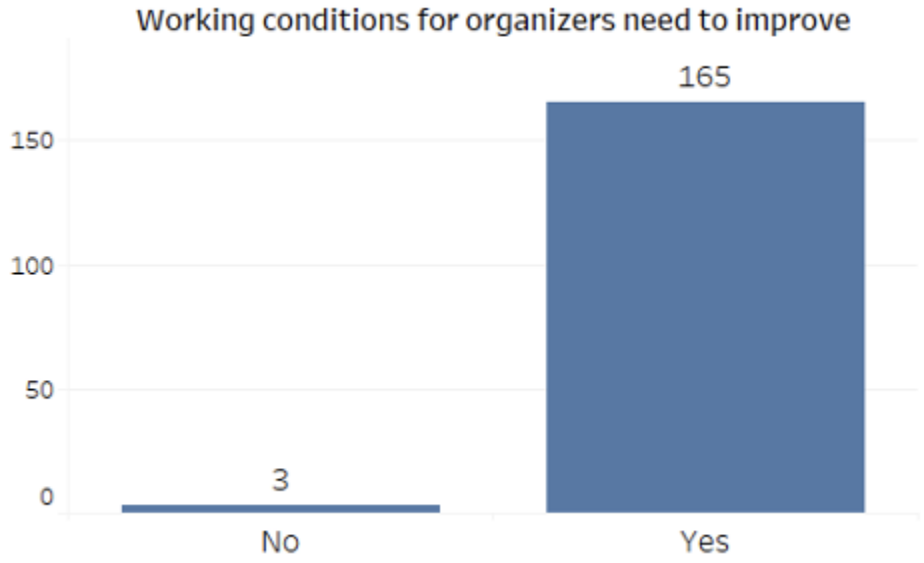
Key takeaway #2: Organizers believe that working conditions need to be improved.

a. Without the necessary resources and a culture of support and implementation, working conditions cannot be improved even when good policies are in place.
b. Organizers believe funders have a critical role to play in improving labor standards.
c. Organizers believe unionization can play an important role in improving working conditions—but having a staff union is only one piece of the puzzle.

"Poor working conditions mean I'm not performing at my best. That means I'm less present, and less effective at getting everything else done. It also strains relationships between organizers and organizations, making coalition building more fragile."

"I'd make the decision-makers fully comprehend that organizers want to do good work, and they rightfully want to get paid as well. I would make nonprofits stop perpetuating the overworked and under-paid climate for organizers and make them remember: there's room to pay your staff higher wages and there's room to develop your communication and relationship with organizers to better understand how to support them, as they are the boots on the ground you so desperately rely on."

As one organizer put it in an interview, a good job would be one that "allows organizers the wage, the space, and the benefits to take care of their mental health." Fair wages and benefits are an important part of what the organizers we surveyed believe constitute a good job—but survey respondents shared that equally if not as more important was having a supportive and transparent organizational culture. A good policy—for example, on taking time off to rest and recharge—means nothing if it is not backed up by the necessary resources and a culture that reinforces and implements that policy.



While fair pay is a baseline expectation for gainful employment, a healthy and "successful" work environment for an organizer also demands good benefits, flexible hours, appropriate work distribution and well-defined roles, mentorship and professional development, good management and recognition, cultural competency and inclusive policies, and well-distributed power and decision-making authority. When these needs aren't met, morale is impacted with a significant physical and emotional toll on organizers who, in turn, spend their time and energy advocating for or overextending themselves to make ends meet, and suffer from high turnover due to burnout.

Crucially, organizers recognized that a lack of sufficient resources limits the capacity of organizations to fully invest in strong organizing infrastructure. As identified by survey respondents, one widely shared issue that impacts organizers' success is lack of resources, primarily as it pertains to pay and staffing shortages. Many respondents also shared that scarcity in the field leads to an inequitable and non-strategic distribution of resources and the prioritization of short-term needs, rather than investing in long-term strengthening of an organization, its practices, and its staff.

The role of funders

Organizers overwhelmingly believe that funders have a critical role to play in co-creating the organizing infrastructure and culture that would support strong organizers, strong organizations, strong campaigns, and ultimately a stronger movement. But our survey respondents shared the belief that funders do not grant enough money, with enough flexibility to allow increased salary and campaign resources to meet the needs of organizers. Nor is it felt that funders value the work of organizers enough to use their influence to pressure grantee leadership to improve overall working conditions in the field, through increased salaries, benefits, and budgets for necessary overhead.

Several organizers shared that current philanthropic practices place undue burdens on organizations, with harmful impacts on organizers. "Foundations come in and with their money and influence, they try to influence coalitions and try to influence the landscape—and not in a very healthy way sometimes," one organizer noted. They shared a particular experience of a campaign they worked on where a funder "came in that was trying to support the political side" of the work, which "really undermined our organizing." Funders, they said, "need to be better partners with the existing, long-standing organizations that have been carrying the work," and not just "be here for the win and that's it." At times, funder expectations drive the work of the organization, even when campaigns would benefit from a different use of resources. "When it comes to funders and movement culture, you always have to prove what you're doing, and it has to be really external, something someone could share on social media or have a video of. And sometimes I think that puts people in a place to create events that may not actually be benefiting the people you're serving," one organizer noted. They brought up an event they held once that didn't seem to have any purpose other than showing funders they were doing something, even if it didn't inspire members or further the campaign. "With funder culture and movement culture, you have to perform a little bit," they said.

Another organizer shared that in their experience, foundations put pressure on organizations to keep salaries low and that they place an "inherent value on how much somebody should get paid." "Funders don't like to see a lot of money go to operations. Funders don't like to see that employees are paid not only to meet their basic needs, but also get to have savings and get to have fun things in there too," they said. "Once your operating costs get too close to even 50 percent or whatever," they said, the message is, "You should be spending your money better. You should be paying yourself less so more money can be going to other things." On a similar note, one organizer with experience hiring paid canvassers for a campaign shared that some foundations who funded their work "didn't understand that $12 an hour, even for a temporary part-time position, is not fair."

BIPOC organizers in particular were interested in funders providing resources for organizers to obtain respite, with several highlighting ongoing initiatives to provide sabbaticals to organizers and paid retreats. Funders, one organizer told us, should be "providing funds for people to get away for a week, to go get a massage, to just take your mind off of this massive campaign that you're working."

Organizers are well aware of the positional power and influence of funders, and shared with us that they believe, as one said, that funders "have a responsibility" to help improve labor standards and working conditions. As one organizer put it to us, "If you're at a national, nationally recognized organization, and they're not treating their employees well, I think that there should be funding consequences for that, because why would you want to invest in that?" Another echoed that message. "If you're investing in this, you need to care for the condition of the organizers and for the program that they're running," this organizer said.

The role of unions

As is shown by the wave of unionization efforts across various sectors that is being led by a new generation of workers, there is a clear and growing desire on the part of young workers for fair wages, benefits, and a voice at their workplace—and the organizing sector is no different. According to our survey, more than 40 percent of respondents were part of a union, in the process of negotiating a union contract, or exploring the idea of forming a union with their colleagues at the time they filled out the survey.

Yet our research found that forming a union can be a challenging process. For more on the role of unionization in the grassroots organizing sector, see "What We've Learned: Unionization" on page TK.

Key takeaway #3: Organizers believe that their working conditions have a direct impact on campaign success as well as on the effectiveness of the broader movement ecosystem.

a. When organizers are burned out, that impacts their ability to lead and win campaigns.
b. The churn and burn of organizers leads to a massive loss of institutional knowledge and expertise, with ripple effects across the entire movement ecosystem.

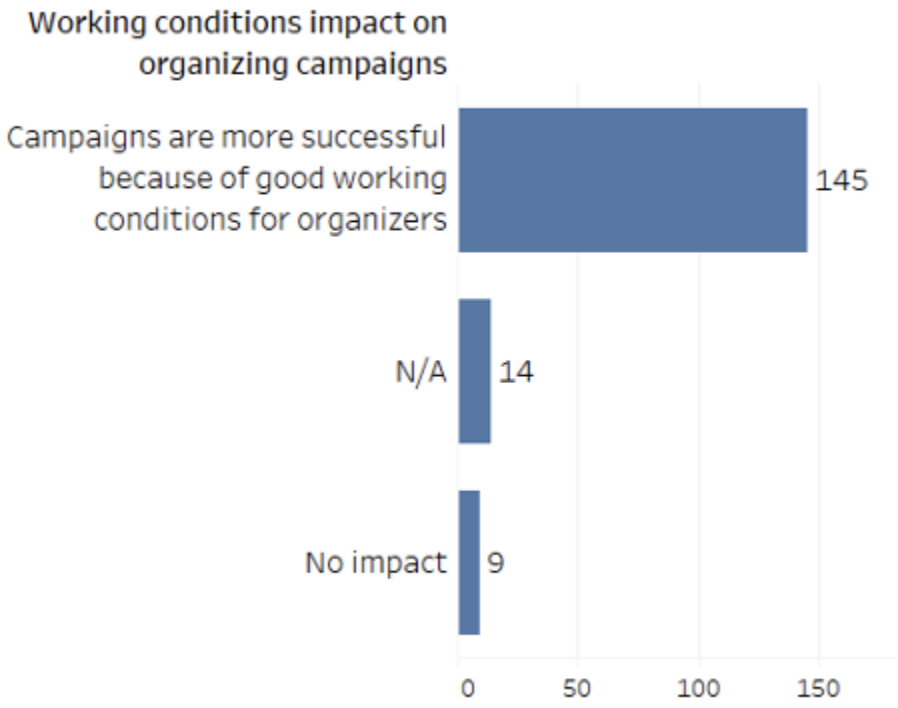
"What happens when the person who holds it all leaves? Then what?"

"A burned-out movement is not a movement."

"It's all connected. If I'm not feeling that my overall wellbeing is as good, I'm not going to be able to do the work as well, and the quality of the work is going to suffer."

The outcomes of our infrastructure and historical challenges are not isolated to the hardships of individual organizers. One key resulting problem is the massive turnover experienced across the organizing field. We can easily identify and cite the ways in which high turnover in other industries is a reflection of systemic issues that directly impact employee satisfaction and loyalty, causing ongoing inefficiencies. And yet, in our own sector, we do not traditionally think of high turnover among organizers as indicative of our lack of impact. High churn rates impact our ability to organize effectively. We have ample evidence that shows that organizers are most successful when they stay in place and build long-term relationships, knowledge, and political expertise in a community. Churn and burnout severely inhibit our ability to build and wield power by putting organizations in a perpetual cycle of hiring and training new staff. This severely limits access to helpful institutional knowledge, re-sets relationships that have already been invested in, and takes considerable time on the part of managers to train new teams. This is a waste of resources in every sense. Put simply: the failure to develop and retain organizers makes it exponentially more difficult to cut and win campaigns that change lives.

Based on our interviews with organizers, the impact of organizer burnout and turnover on campaigns is felt strongly, and has longer-term impacts on campaigns, an organization's membership, and the overall health and success of an organization. Overwhelmingly, organizers believe that campaigns are more successful when organizers have good working conditions.



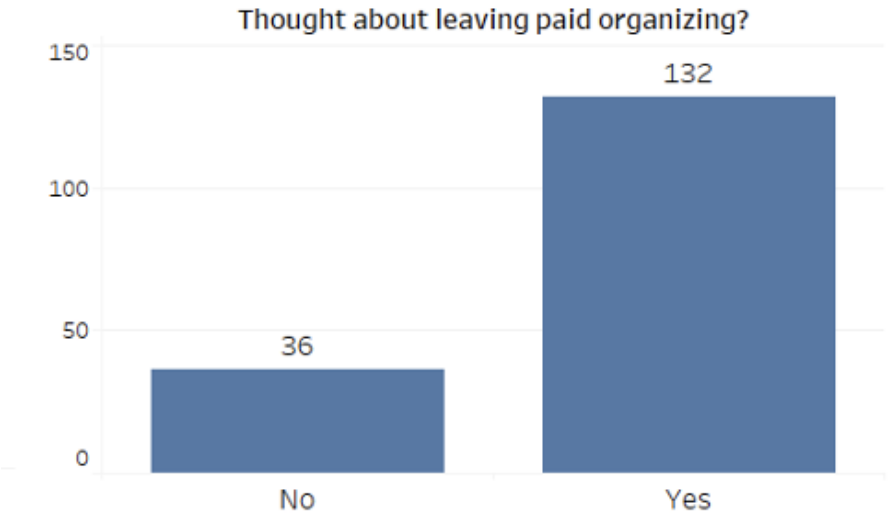
Organizing is all about relationships, and relationship-building. When an organizer leaves, all too often those relationships must be rebuilt. As one organizer put it to us, "What happens when the person who holds it all leaves? Then what?" Institutional knowledge is lost, and campaigns lose momentum. At understaffed organizations, other staff are forced to pick up

additional work, adding to their already unsustainable workloads. “I think campaigns always suffer with turnover,” one organizer told us.

The long-term impacts of treating organizers as replaceable cogs are evident in the state of community organizing today. The building blocks of community power—organized people, money, and ideas—are atrophying as the lack of quality staff dwindles. We think power should belong to the group, not just to a CEO or director, and we think that understanding power means a commitment to equity and justice. We think people should receive quality job training and development that grows their abilities and builds sustainable, successful organizations. And we think organizers who invest in their work are deserving of reciprocal investments, and should be able to turn good jobs into good careers. As one organizer told us, organizing is a marathon, and the work never ends. But with all of this in place, they said, “I think we would start winning more.”

Key takeaway #4: We cannot take for granted that people want (or will always want) to do these jobs.

a. More than three out of every four organizers we surveyed have contemplated leaving paid organizing.
b. Organizing currently is not viewed by many organizers as a sustainable long-term career—and organizers who want to stay in movement work often feel hampered by the lack of growth opportunities.
c. In addition, poor working conditions prevent a large pool of potential applicants—often the ones we need most—from even considering organizing jobs.

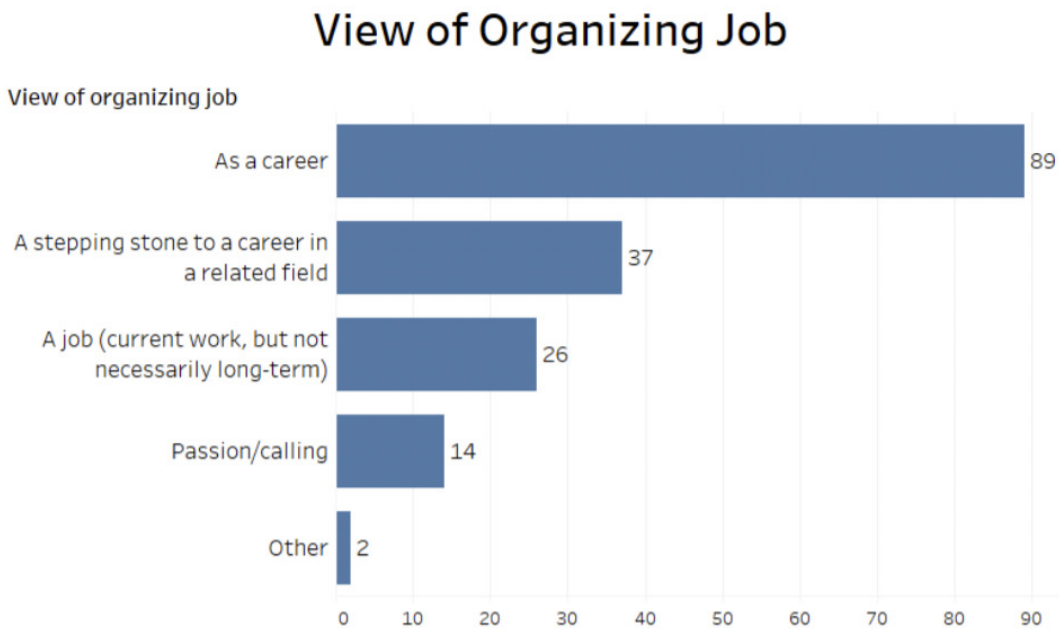


“I left the field because I was tired and experienced burnout. Further, it was too difficult to take time off after a campaign and as a result, I felt stressed, anxious, unfulfilled, and unhappy.”

More than three out of every four organizers we surveyed have contemplated leaving paid organizing jobs, pointing to the deep need for improved working conditions. Several people we interviewed shared that they have either left organizing jobs in the past due to poor working conditions or are contemplating leaving their current positions. One organizer told us they "definitely deal with way more anxiety, depression because of the movement work." As a result, it has led them to contemplate leaving the sector: "It has led me to want to work outside of any kind of organization or nonprofit, and just do my own thing." Another told us, "I've been thinking about other things. I've been thinking about being a social worker." Organizing, they said, "still feels like precarious work today."

One organizer we spoke with shared that they are not the only organizer at their organization that has left their job or plans to leave at some point: "The other organizer left. And then we lost another organizer last year. I thought everyone's going to be sticking around, but it was like, nope, people were leaving. At least from my perspective, it had to have been because of the workload."

Yet our survey data seems to indicate that most organizers wish to remain in the field. The majority of organizers we surveyed—53 percent—shared that they view organizing as a career, with 22 percent sharing that they view their current job as a stepping stone to a career in a related field. The data also suggests that addressing some of the low workplace standards might increase the number of organizers who see the work as a long-term career possibility.



Organizers do not and should not feel the need to remain at their organization or in the organizing field for their entire lives; a healthy movement ecosystem would be full of people with grassroots organizing experience who can then translate their skills to either different positions within that ecosystem or in other sectors altogether. The goal is not lifetime

retention at one organization—rather, the goal is to support and invest in people so that our movement continues to grow. As one organizer told us, "If you really want this to be a movement, you can't just expect people to come in and out." Yet as it stands currently, there are significant barriers that prevent organizers from both remaining at an organization and within the broader movement. What we have is a movement where organizers leave after two to three years, exhausted and burned out. Some of the barriers have already been identified in the previous section—but organizers raised several other barriers during interviews.

Notably, the lack of training as well as the lack of career advancement opportunities have made some organizers contemplate leaving the field altogether. One organizer shared that there is a common perception that to improve working conditions like pay, they would have to "specialize to become a comms or development person." But when they applied for those jobs, "I didn't qualify for any of them, even after five years as an organizer." They continued: "What does that say, that the job that I was in for five years didn't adequately prepare me for any kind of upward momentum?" They added that this "perpetuates a culture of exploiting young people rather than creating a sustainable culture of people who are looking for a career."

The impact of burnout on organizers from historically marginalized communities is another important dynamic that should be lifted up. When working-class organizers leave the sector due to burnout, they often do not have the networks to fall back on that organizers from wealthier backgrounds and families do. As one organizer from a working-class family told us, it is powerful to recruit organizers who are, as they put it, "most impacted." "If they're working class, it's probably the first generation that is going to college that is organizing. That has a big impact in the life of that family, because they're in these professional jobs, but what happens when they burn out?" they said. "When I burned out, what was my safety net? It was my family. And my family comes from a working-class background." They added, "We have to acknowledge the class difference and that the impact of burnout is different depending on what resources you have to go back to."

Relatedly, several organizers brought up the impact of poor working conditions in placing constraints on who can afford to become an organizer. Organizers noted that low wages, in particular, leads to organizers overwhelmingly being young white people from fairly comfortable backgrounds. As one former organizer put it, most of her fellow campaign organizers were "young and had no real financial obligations and maybe still had some family support." They added, "If you weren't in that position, I think it made it pretty much impossible to work on campaigns." On a similar note, another organizer told us, "the salaries are too damn low," which leads to "the expectation that you have to be young enough to have roommates" to be an organizer. They added, "Almost everyone I know who is older than me and is in this nonprofit world has a partner who is on the dark side. They're working for a corporation, they're doing real estate. That is how [the organizer] is able to do what they're doing."

In both the short- and long-term, all of this has severe consequences for the vibrant, representative movement we need. Past research on union organizer retention has found that the "cowboy mentality"—a work culture that assumes organizing is "more than a job" and requires tremendous sacrifice, including of personal relationships—is alienating to

women, single parents, and organizers rooted in a community.[17] We found a similar dynamic in our research. One organizer shared that bad working conditions make other people not want to be organizers, and that people are "turned off by organizing jobs because of all of the conditions." "When I've sent people organizing jobs, they were like, girl, I would never," they added. As one organizer noted, "I feel like again, like white males have lasted so much longer in the social justice movement in [my state] than people of color and women of color." This has an impact on the strength of an organization's base building and membership. As another organization noted, "I think maybe more people would want to be part of organizations if they saw themselves reflected in those organizations."

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

"We can't find trained organizers, and it costs too much money and takes too much time for us to be able to train organizers who are very green."

"The challenges around hiring are worse than I have seen in the 30 years that I have been involved as an activist."

"Organizers need to be in an organization that's really invested and teaching them skills early enough in their career to feel like they're having success in the work, and then they have to get paid enough and have benefits so they feel like the work is not a sacrifice that they're making in their larger life."

We found that the executive directors we interviewed were well-aware of the challenges that organizers face, both sector-wide and within their own organizations. Most directors we spoke with had themselves been organizers before assuming leadership positions, and have experienced the poor working conditions that today's organizers confront as well. Many executive directors want organizing jobs to be good jobs, and for their organizational culture to support their staff. As one put it, a good organizing job would be "sustainable," with a forty-hour workweek when possible, time for rest, sabbaticals, living wages, and robust benefits, as well as one in which the organizer would receive training, coaching, and professional development. Another shared that in addition to compensating people fairly and "paying people what they need in order to not just survive but thrive," there needs to be a "path for growth."

One executive director, whose staff recently successfully unionized, shared that at their organization, "There's a culture of organizing that then is really setting up organizers to be successful."

17 For more, see: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0160449X0302800302?journalCode=lsja

But as is evident from the organizer surveys and interviews, this is not yet the norm. Because today's directors often came up in organizations that underpaid organizers, it can be difficult to totally shake free of the notions that organizers should "pay their dues" by working for unreasonably low wages or in poor working conditions. When directors extrapolate their experience ("I made it, so if they really want to be organizers, they'll be able to make it, too") to explain away structural problems in the workplace, we fail to set a new standard for what a reasonable expectation should be in the social justice sector. At times, directors continue to believe that self-sacrifice is part of the bill that one must pay to be a committed organizer. At other times, directors are hesitant to raise concerns with donors out of fear of losing much-needed funding.

There is another role that funders play in placing constraints on organizational leadership. Often, executive directors feel pressure to prioritize funds for programmatic work, rather than necessary infrastructure such as staffing needs (which can include hiring more staff, paying current staff sustainable wages and salaries, and increasing benefits). This has serious implications for the long-term health of an organization. Whether or not that pressure is explicitly articulated by funders, there is still a widely held assumption and expectation that funders want to see concrete impact and results from the resources they provide organizations, and most funders still don't view people as the most valuable resource an organization has. In line with a 2018 survey[18] of nonprofit leaders by the Nonprofit Finance Fund, the executive directors we spoke to identified several staffing issues (including the ability to offer competitive salaries and employing enough staff to carry out their mission) as major challenges, all of which are related in no small part to the funding they receive.

Key takeaway #1: Directors don't have the resources they need to pay more competitive salaries and build staff capacity.

a. Most community organizations can't compete with labor union salaries or larger national organizations. Some also can't (or choose not to) compete with retail or food-service jobs.
b. Funders are not supporting organizations to increase pay or establish pay scales, or understanding that raising staff pay in a systemic manner requires a multi-year investment.
c. National organizations and networks who make sub-grants to state-based groups question higher salaries.

Overall, executive directors shared that they believe funders have a large role to play in improving labor standards at their organizations.

18 The Nonprofit Finance Fund found that: 66 percent of leaders said offering competitive pay to their workers is a top challenge; 59 percent said employing enough staff is a top challenge; 62 percent said financial sustainability is a top challenge, and 57 percent said full-cost funding is a top challenge.

For more, go to: https://nff.org/surveydata

One director of a smaller organization identified unrealistic expectations from funders as a major challenge in raising salaries.[19] "Our budget is growing slower," they said, which makes it hard to "balance between hiring enough staff that people aren't overwhelmed in the work and burning out for that reason, and making sure people have economic security and a path to economic mobility in the organization." They added, "I think we are actually investing quite a bit of our funds into personnel, but there are expectations from funders and supporters about what we should be able to achieve with the budget we have." They shared that they were frustrated at times by the mismatch between funders' expectations and what their grant dollars are intended to support. "Everyone wants to know the demographics of your staff and board and everyone wants to know your turnover rates, but nobody wants to fund the work that would allow for those things to be strong," they said, adding, "I've tried to express that to funders, to be like, this is actually really important to be funding this because these are things that a lot of funders will not fund but they still hold you accountable to."

On a related note, a different executive director also raised rigid funder expectations as a challenge that could lead to staff burnout. They brought up the example of a time when they were short-staffed, yet still were expected to meet certain deliverables. "We thought we would have a full staff of five to do this work, but instead we only have three. But we still have to produce the deliverables of five, and the funder doesn't understand why I don't just hire people, and that's a stress," they said. They added, "It creates additional burnout for existing staff in an organization."

In addition, another executive director shared that they wished funders would recognize that organizations need to be able to build capacity for other staff to take time off. "Funders could be like, you say that you need X amount of money for this position, and we're going to tack on another 25 percent to cover your other staffing needs," they said.

Another executive director shared that they believe organizations led by people of color face a higher level of scrutiny from funders. "In terms of resources, white-led organizations get more attention from the funders, and BIPOC have a harder time raising money, especially if they're doing something different. I've had funders question the lines of budget about salaries, asking why they're high, and I have to explain why we think people need to make a living wage," they said. This was echoed by another executive director, who shared that organizations led by Black women are often under-resourced and that funders continue to seek immediate outcomes over longer-term infrastructure-building. As they put it, the "lack of resources story" needs to be told.

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19 Relatedly, a 2013 report by the Center for Effective Philanthropy found that half of nonprofit leaders did not believe funders were aware of the challenges their organizations faced. For more, see: http://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/NonprofitChallenges.pdf

Directors acknowledged that, as one put it, there are no easy answers to solving these challenges around organizer hiring, retention, and support so they can stay in the movement for the long haul—but as one put it, "there's a role in terms of pushing philanthropy around this." They continued: "Because when I speak to other EDs that are really struggling, a lot of it is around, I don't have enough money to have all the positions filled that I want to fill and to keep the good people that I want to keep, and to me, that really comes down to, how does philanthropy operate in our sector? And what is the work that organizations that maintain a lot of those relationships can do to push them to think bigger about what their role is?"

Another executive director acknowledged that their inability to match the salaries of larger organizations was a challenge. "One challenge we had in the past was that we had organizers that were paid by the union, and they made lots more money than the organizers that were paid though our fiscal sponsor, because those organizers were paid through our grants," they said. "I would say that our challenges are in getting enough funding to do our work, and to deal with all the issues that come up with regard to undocumented status." On a similar note, one executive director said they were well aware of disparities in salaries between their group and other organizations. 'We just did our budget for 2022, and by far the largest increases were in salary and benefits as it should be. And I hear that one group in Seattle is starting at $70,000 or $75,000, and we're not there," they told us. "And I'm like, man, like, what is the impediment to that?"

Key takeaway #2: It is difficult to find, hire, and retain trained organizers, especially organizers who come from or represent the communities they are working with.

a. Low salaries were widely acknowledged as a barrier to hiring and retaining organizers.
b. There is a universal desire for more available resources for training and training infrastructure.
c. Organizers don't typically have a ladder to move up. There are many organizing jobs, but very few supervisory roles that utilize the skills they've developed.
d. Organizing is already stressful, and more needs to be done to support the health and wellbeing of organizers, and in particular BIPOC organizers who often face additional stressors in their positions, in order to avoid burnout.

Almost all EDs shared frustrations with not being able to find and retain trained organizers. For one director, part of the challenge is the lack of organizers in the state where they operate: "When we have a new organizing position open, the number of people who apply for it, who have ever had experience in organizing, is typically very slim. If not, zero. And we certainly have people that apply that have worked through the Democratic Party or they've worked on a ballot initiative, but in terms of applicants that actually know what organizing is and have had experience doing it, we tend to have a very, very small pool."

They continued: "We typically are hiring people that we think have a lot of the orientation and drive and passion for justice that we think is required for organizing, but have very few, if any, concrete skills, and so we're doing a lot of investment in folks to teach them the skills of organizing. And so, to some extent, we're taking a chance on people that we think…have a lot of the building blocks for what would make a great, great organizer." That has led to retention issues. At times, they said, organizers only stay at their organization for one or two years. In a similar vein, another executive director noted hiring new organizers requires a significant amount of onboarding and a certain level of risk. "There is also the stress of, I'm gonna have to take a risk and hire somebody who's totally new to this work. And that requires just a huge investment."

There are regional challenges—one executive director based in the South shared that until recently, training for organizers was something that didn't exist in the region, which has led to challenges in hiring. This same director added that there was a need to professionalize organizing in order to move from simply executing tasks to a more strategic mindset. Another ED also noted the lack of experienced organizers in their state, and in particular, organizers of color. "When you do find experienced people, it's usually a white guy," they said. In a similar vein, one ED noted that "it's really exceptionally challenging to hire bilingual folks right now." They shared that part of the issue is that organizations typically do not compensate bilingual organizers fairly, and that oftentimes, people who may be inclined to organizing take non-organizing jobs that financially reward their language skills. "I do think that the organizing side of the sector has historically not paid bilingual differentials in the way that a lot of unions do." They added, "We need to think about actually compensating people for a skill that we need."

But the lack of experienced organizers isn't limited to only certain states. As one ED put it, "I think that we as a movement don't have a deep bench in terms of trained organizers."

This has led them to "focus on training, especially because we are focused on bringing in young BIPOC into the work." Their organization has, they said, "made training a key part of onboarding" where they "are teaching all the basics of organizing and creating opportunities for those in the program to test their skills along the way."

Training—or the lack thereof—was a common theme. Another ED shared it has been a challenge to find the trainings that, they said, "we know we need."[20] One director noted that the lack of organizer training leads to misconceptions about the realities of organizing work**.** "People come into organizing with this idea that it's very similar to the activism that they have done because they've recruited their friends to come out to a rally with them. And then they find out the hard truth is that this is really hard work. It's emotionally hard work, and it's really hard because you're in a struggle," they said.

That disconnect, they noted, can often lead to burnout. And several executive directors specifically shared they were worried about staff organizers experiencing burnout. "I think there's a culture in organizing generally that promotes that kind of all hands on deck, show up to everything [mentality]. We are actually trying to disrupt that," one ED said.

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20 Organizations dedicated to training organizers exist (i.e., re:power and the Midwest Academy), but some executive directors expressed a desire for either more local or more tailored trainings.

As many organizers we surveyed and interviewed spoke about, the culture of martyrdom prevalent in the organizing sector often has severe, negative impacts on organizers. One executive director acknowledged that organizers' expectations have changed from when they began as an organizer, where the expectation was that you would devote your life to the work. "We're in a new world where people want work-life balance," they said, adding of organizers, "They want to not only be in struggle, they want to smell the flowers of the world that they are building and do stuff with their kids or family, and all that good stuff that goes with it. I've had a struggle with that. I still struggle with that a lot, because while you want to shut off at six o'clock and go home and do things, there's a lot of people out there that can't." Their commitment to the mission, they said, "drives me to work long hours and makes me feel like I need to do everything I possibly can do." It has been challenging, they said, to balance the need for sustainability with the realities of the work. "We have good vacations. We provide good benefits. We just added ten free mental health sessions. I'm trying to figure out what other supports you need to stick and stay. But at one point, I started hearing from organizers, 'you're asking for too much,'" they said. And added, "I still struggle with the idea of our people looking for a forty-hour workweek."

Another ED also noted the role of trauma in making it difficult to hire and retain organizers, and in particular BIPOC organizers: "Trauma also is a challenge. Remember that the people who come to work in organizing from the communities themselves hold a lot of trauma—personal and from their jobs, and everything else. We can't ignore that or the role that it plays." They added, "That's why we put a lot of emphasis on self-care and make sure that we work as a team."

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Several executive directors acknowledged that part of the problem is the salaries they pay. "I know a big challenge for us that we've had to address has been raising wages, raising salaries," one said. They continued: "We've always had excellent benefits, but we were really struggling with hiring people or retaining people, in part because of having slightly lower wages than others." In particular, they said, "it becomes hard when you're competing with national organizations."

Another director agreed that low salaries make it hard to recruit organizers. "It seems to be across the board that organizers are really hard to find these days. Economically, it tends to attract younger folks earlier in their profession given the salary ranges." They added, "It's a really hard balance, because we want to compensate people. We want to make sure people have a living wage." The challenges, they said, were how to raise wages as a small organization. Despite fairly generous benefits including five weeks of vacation, three months of paid family leave, and an employer match for retirement savings, "It's really hard for us to be able to compete with some of these bigger organizations that might be able to offer more or have more stability," they said. "We want to meet those expectations, but the question is, how can you meet those expectations, while also ensuring the sustainability of the organization?"

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The lack of career ladders can also make it challenging to retain organizers who wish to advance their careers, and is often related to salary issues as well. One executive director shared that the lack of opportunities for career advancement at their organization leads some organizers to leave. "If you're looking to be an organizing director or you're looking for something different, there are other unions that will hire from our staff, and many of them pay better than us," they said. Another director shared that they feel having a career path for organizers is "super important in terms of retaining people." But, they said, "We do not do a great job of explaining to people that this is a thing that you can do forever."

But there is a difference between organizers leaving to take on a different role in the movement ecosystem and organizers leaving the movement altogether, one director noted. Training organizers isn't only necessary for individual organizations, but for the broader movement ecosystem as a whole. "We're not going to be the career path for everyone. We're going to have a lot of people come in here and canvass and not all of them are going to stay and work for our organization," they said. "We don't have the ability to promote everybody, but it is our job for everybody to leave here being better at this work than they were when they started." They continued: "A thing that I hear often from people is frustration at training people and then having them leave, and I'm just like, it's my job to train people and have them leave. Sure, it's good if they stay, but the way that the movement grows, is that people leave and do other things and start new projects and make other things get bigger. You investing in an employee is not just about your organization and your future work, it is about a world that we are building where we want like everyone to have the same access to the democratic process and to be able to shape the course of the world."

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Key takeaway #3: Directors don't have access to centralized information about wages, benefits, and best management practices on how to create and maintain sustainable jobs.

a. Some directors get data and best practices informally from other organizations and colleagues.
b. Fiscal sponsors can sometimes provide more data on salaries, but often let directors set their own terms without standardization across projects.
c. When salary data is available, it oftens includes much larger or national organizations that are not comparable to local- and state-based groups.
d. Even for executive directors who participate in national networks, there is no formal process for executive directors to share and discuss best employment practices.

Many executive directors we spoke with shared that they are actively working to improve the labor standards at their organizations, in order to address organizer burnout. One executive director, who identified raising salaries as their most important goal in improving organizer hiring and retention, shared that they have done extensive research on what other organizations pay their staffers, from looking into groups' 990s to outreach to comparable groups. "We want people to feel economic security in a very meaningful way, and it still feels like we just don't have the…support or infrastructure to make sure that that happens," they said.

Several executive directors shared that they have created informal networks to share ideas with other directors. But in general, as another director noted, "people just don't have any really good ideas of how to figure out whether they're paying a competitive rate in their organizing market." One executive director expressed an interest in thinking about how to "support other directors to think about what it looks like to invest in staff—organizing staff and others—in a long-term way" but that "there's just not places where directors are invited into a cohort." This was echoed by another executive director, who shared that they have been having informal conversations with other executive directors on concrete ways to prevent staff burnout, especially during the pandemic. But, they said, "If you are an executive director who has one employee or two employees, you probably don't have a lot of access to resources to help you think that through." They added, "A lot of us have started talking more about what we are doing to make sure that we are all surviving, and that includes sharing advice. I don't feel like there is a single formal network. If there is a formal way that people are doing it, I am not aware of it." Having these networks is particularly important for executive directors of color. As one put it, "Lots of BIPOC directors are new, they don't have the experience as a director, and don't have the networks that white folks have. They don't have a support structure."

Importantly, one executive director shared that at times, directors are wary of being open about the challenges they are experiencing due to concerns that it may impact their funding. "Even as much as we've talked about it for years, it's still really hard to get into a coalition space where people are actually able to talk about their weaknesses, because they're afraid that will show up on our funders' radar," they said.

Ultimately, directors want organizers to be able to thrive, which in turn will lead their campaigns, organizations, and the broader movement ecosystem to thrive. As one executive director said, "Organizers need to be in an organization that's really invested and teaching them skills early enough in their career to feel like they're having success in the work, and then they have to get paid enough and have benefits so they feel like the work is not a sacrifice that they're making in their larger life."

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: FUNDERS

Organizer: "I would make all funders accountable for job quality at their grantee organizations. Those with racial equity commitments would understand that living wages and benefits are a race and gender equity issue, given who tends to have the low-level nonprofit occupations, and proactively step up to make sure they fund good-quality career-worthy jobs."

Organizer: "Funders need to stop attempting to dictate the work that organizing groups are doing. They need to fund us more generously and on our terms."

Organizer: "Funders like action, but money goes into wins at the expense of burning out organizers."

Funder: "We have power, and we need to own that."

Funder: "We should see ourselves as agents at the service of the movement."

Funder: "In a more equitable, ideal world, philanthropy's role would be to shift capital and shift resources in a way so that organizing jobs are not stop and go, they're not ad hoc, and they're actually well-resourced."

You're probably familiar with this story: Funders decide to invest in organizations based on the impact they're having, or attempting to have, on a particular issue or with a particular constituency. Those organizations do what they can to build a team to execute ambitious plans. But due to explicit or implicit funding constraints, directors do not use the funding

they've received to cover overhead expenses, such as wages, benefits, and additional training because they need to allocate the funding to program costs. After all, they have deliverables that they promised, and need to show impact. Organizational leaders justify these decisions with the logic that, "if we don't demonstrate impact and receive this funding, there won't be any jobs to have at all." Something is better than nothing, even if that something is ultimately harming organizing staff, the organization, campaigns, and the broader movement ecosystem.

Operating under these constraints, organizers work in their positions for as long as they're able to bear the brunt, and then they leave, taking all of their experience, knowledge, and community relationships with them. Organizations hire new workers to replace them and begin the cycle again, spending thousands of dollars and countless hours training new team members. As a result, that time and money is no longer being directed toward base building efforts, outreach, and strategic communications—the work that helps to win campaigns and build community power over time.

And for the funders whose resources are supporting this organization, they are frustrated and disappointed, believing that more could have or should have been accomplished during the grant period.

We need a new story.

We believe that funders—given their positional power and influence—have a critical role to play in normalizing and incentivizing new labor practices, and can work in partnership with organizers and directors to ensure that these new standards take hold, and that the sector shifts.

As it stands now, funders are often left unaware of how employees at grantee organizations experience their jobs, unless the problem has reached a certain level of severity (and sometimes, illegality). Currently, funders predominantly look at an organization's external impact and overall financial health to assess whether they should receive grant funds. We propose that funders need to look at the internal labor practices of their proposed grantees, as well.

Standard grantmaking processes do not currently include an in-depth look at the human resources procedures or back-end functioning of an organization, aside from topline numbers of the cost of personnel and overhead on budget reports.[21] Oddly, labor practices are not currently considered when assessing the "health" of an organization. Funders want to get the best from their grantees and support the type of capacity-building that helps organizations perform at their highest level. But there is currently a tension between the impact that funders must see to feel confident in their grantmaking, and the theory that high overhead is unsustainable for most organizations, especially for community organizing at the state and local level.

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21 For more on this traditional funding gap, see the Full Cost Project, a joint initiative of Philanthropy California and the Nonprofit Finance Fund: https://www.philanthropyca.org/full-cost-project

According to both our interviews with organizers and directors, the dominant mindset within philanthropy continues to deprioritize building a sustainable movement and is focused on immediate concrete wins. This impedes staff retention and professional development, forcing organizers to withstand poor working conditions and lack of mobility for the sake of their commitment to the mission. Some program officers are well-aware of how this mindset is harmful. "There's often not a lot of respect in being an organizer for a long time, even though it's a skill that is vital, that is crucial to our work, and that quite frankly, a lot of things fall apart without it," one funder told us.

One lesson from the philanthropic response to the crises of 2020 is that many of the practices long requested by organizations, including more flexible general operating support and streamlined reporting procedures, became possible to implement when framed as a necessary response to an urgent need. We believe that institutionalizing the practices of trust-based philanthropy alongside permanent shifts in the culture around the role of organizers will lead to more sustainable careers in organizing; stronger and more strategic relationships between funders and organizations; and ultimately, more successful campaign outcomes.

Change is clearly possible. While the challenges are daunting, there are examples we can look to within and outside of philanthropy for guidance, and to build upon previous efforts to push for equity within the sector. For example, roughly 20 years ago, it was largely unheard of for funders to ask about an organization's approach to racial equity or impact on structural racism unless they were a foundation or donor specifically focused on racial justice. Since that time, there have been numerous leaders, affinity groups, and projects that have taken up the mantle of educating and instilling the need for philanthropy to take a position on racial justice through their assessment process; investments in capacity-building; funding of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; and more. As such, the shift in racial justice as a cornerstone of social justice organizing has been palpable. There is still a long way to go, and the process of getting to where we are hasn't been easy or without complication, but it is clear that little progress would have been made without funders being (as least slightly) more intentional in their commitment to racial justice. That is just one example of where funders have been able to work in partnership with experts, frontline leaders, and their grantees to begin to shift their practices accordingly. We believe that something similar is possible to help funders ensure and enforce higher labor standards for organizers.

All Due Respect's work is rooted in the idea that these new labor standards would be a win-win-win. But they won't be created without intention, commitment, and funders embracing their positional power in relationship with grantee organizations and their staff.

In our interviews with select funders—all of whom fund grassroots organizing, care about organizers, and have shown both a desire and a willingness to alter practices—some common themes and takeaways emerged.

Key takeaway #1: There is a set of funders who understand the need to shift how they fund and support organizing, and who understand there is a disconnect between how we value organizing and how we actually treat organizers.

a. These program officers recognize the negative impact on organizations and campaigns if working conditions for organizers are poor.
b. And they recognize that poor working conditions have a particularly harmful impact on recruiting and retaining BIPOC organizers.
c. Many funders recognize the need for a reframing of organizers, not as replaceable labor, but as our strongest resource to invest in.

"Being able to invest in organizers for the long-term is actually more cost effective and actually has a larger impact. And it's definitely better for organizers, who have to be living under conditions of that boom-and-bust cycle, which often also results in a lack of benefits."

The funders we interviewed were well aware of the impact of burnout on organizers, and the broader movement. The pandemic's impact on burnout cannot be overstated. "I think we're having a mass movement burnout, and we can see it. We're seeing individual leaders burn out as well, from all areas of an organization. I'm seeing people who I never thought would ever burn out and leave, crashing and burning right now," they said. They added, "We're all exhausted, we're all tired. We're all being pulled in a million directions. And we now snap at each other. We're not our best selves. The burnout is real within the movement. And so, we're not able to mobilize the same amount of people. We're not able to bring folks to the table."

As one program officer at a large foundation that supports organizing in a number of states told us, philanthropic organizations should have a "better assessment and a better understanding of the conditions of organizers." A good workplace culture, this funder continued, "would look like a culture that balanced investing in the development of your people, as much as the development of the people you're trying to organize." Before joining philanthropy, they had worked as a community organizer, which gave them a deeper understanding of the challenges that organizers face. They recalled that the salary they were paid did not allow them to adequately support their family, but they also recognize that the causes of high organizer turnover are, as they put it, "multi-directional." "It was one of the hardest things I remember, coming home from an action and feeling on a high, and then coming home and having to deal with some of the challenges we were having because of financial issues," they said. They added: "I think if you had the same pay, but you didn't have the same level of intensity and the burnout, I think more people might stay. But to not have as much burnout, you have to have more people, or you'd have to have different leadership that allows you to do the work."

Several funders noted the impact of organizer turnover on an organization's ability to win campaigns and build for the long-term. "If that staff person is transitioning every 18 months,

you're never building momentum. You're never building the infrastructure that you need. You're constantly training over and over again," one funder said. High organizer turnover, one funder noted, leads to the loss of organizational relationships. They brought up a time when the volunteer coordinator at an organization they funded left their role, which led critical relationships with volunteers to atrophy. "That ladder of engagement all needs to get rebuilt. And that trust that was there starts to dwindle," they said. Another funder shared that turnover means that resources are being used on training new hires, when those same resources could be better used on other aspects of the work. Relatedly, they added, instead of hiring an organizer for a short-term campaign, it's a far better use of resources to bring on an organizer beyond the few months of a campaign. "Being able to invest in organizers for the long-term is actually more cost effective and actually has a larger impact. And it's definitely better for organizers, who have to be living under conditions of that boom-and-bust cycle, which often also results in a lack of benefits." As another funder shared, "One of our grantees made a really great point—that it really takes five years of direct, on-the-ground organizing to get really, really good at it. And so if you have people leaving every two years, we actually never develop a sustained, well-seasoned organizer. And I was like, whew, accurate." But, they said, there is often an "over-focus on electoral cycles, or an over-focus to get a bill in the legislature and not a long-term plan."

"It seems like the things that we look to change in society for workers—the benefits, the good pay—we don't apply them to organizers. We don't seek the same things for organizers because we see that as sacrifice labor."

Relatedly, one funder we interviewed noted how a culture of focusing on short-term campaign wins can, if it leads to organizer burnout, hurt the long-term health of an organization and the movement. "Strategic decision-making is not just the ability to win, but the winning and the effects of it, and whether organizers and leaders will be burned out in doing it and not be able to endure for the long-term. That would be a factor in the consideration of what it looks like to build long-term power—the health and ecology of the people you're building power with."

Working conditions, several funders noted, have a disproportionate impact on organizations' ability to hire BIPOC organizers. Due to a combination of factors, many of which are related to an organization's capacity to train organizers, it's often easier to hire organizers who have gone to college and have organizing experience from their time as an undergraduate, one funder noted. Expanding the candidate pool "requires a lot more resources," they said. And, they added, "Those resources often are not there."

Another funder also recognized that far too often, organizations—and by extension, the funders who support them—do not practice what they preach when it comes to labor standards for their own workers. "It seems like the things that we look to change in society for workers—the benefits, the good pay—we don't apply them to organizers. We don't seek the same things for organizers because we see that as sacrifice labor," they said. They continued: "This worldview complicates our perception of what could be the best future for organizers. For me, the first thing that has to change is that perception, and to understand

that organizers are people who are committing their lives to social change for everyone. And because of that, they need special attention and special support."

The necessary changes go beyond just paying good wages and salaries. One funder shared that their grantees are paying their organizers living wages, yet still encountering retention issues. "My best guess is that it is because of the outside extremeness of the moment we are all living through," they said, noting in particular the trauma of the pandemic, which hit communities of color the hardest, as well as rightwing legislative attacks on voting rights, abortion, and transgender Americans. Which makes it all the more necessary to, as another funder said, to "create opportunities for organizers to continue to thrive, with more stable families" so that they don't "burn out in five years and then go out to try to find that job that is going to allow their families to survive."

Key takeaway #2: Funders have a critical role to play in improving labor standards for organizers—but it must happen in partnership with organizations.

a. These program officers are well aware of how traditional funding practices and the dominant culture of philanthropy—especially how funders view their relationship with their grantees—has helped to solidify poor working conditions for organizers.
b. There needs to be a transformational shift in the relationship between funders and grantee organizations, from a hierarchical relationship to a true partnership based on trust.
c. Beyond shifting more resources to organizations, a trust-based partnership with grantees must also be structured to enable executive directors to better support their staff.

"First and foremost is making sure that organizations have enough staff to actually hold the actual work that needs to happen at an organization."

"You could imagine philanthropy working together to say we should have a set of standard questions we ask about labor—do your staff have health insurance? Does your staff make enough money to not be rent-burdened? I think that could be powerful."

All of the funders we interviewed believe, as one put it, that "there's a role for funders to help organizations grow in a way that's authentic to them." " We're not just funding a one-off campaign, but we're also funding the organization's health and the people who work there's health and well-being," they said.

Several of the funders we interviewed recognized that often, a lack of resources prevents organizations from providing good labor conditions—and that funders have a responsibility to provide those resources. "In a more equitable, ideal world, philanthropy's role would be to shift capital and shift resources in a way so that organizing jobs are not stop and go, they're not ad hoc, and they're actually well-resourced. They have benefits," one funder said, adding, "Organizing is a skill that you build over time, and you should be paid according to the level of experience that it takes to build that skill."

As one funder noted of many organizations, "They want to give to people, they don't want to exploit their organizers, but often, they don't have that stability. So providing organizations with those long-term resources is one of the first steps that can help on that." Other funders noted that they have an obligation to adequately resource organizing groups to hire a sufficient number of staff. "First and foremost is making sure that organizations have enough staff to actually hold the actual work that needs to happen at an organization," one said.

There is a growing interest in providing more long-term support with fewer strings attached. Foundations should, one funder said, shift more towards offering "multi-year general operating support, which gives folks flexibility to address what they're doing." That flexibility, another funder added, allows organizations to build the infrastructure that "makes a strong organization," including wages and benefits for staff. As one funder put it, "It should be the standard of what program officers are trying to achieve, if they're trying to build power in communities, I think organizers and groups need the flexibility to be able to help their staff."

"I don't think many of us interrogate what an organizer makes or what kind of benefits people get. It would be great if we did that as part of our practice."

But many also noted that for the broader philanthropic world to commit more resources that have fewer strings attached to organizing efforts, funders need to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of organizing. As one funder said of philanthropy, "There's not a clear understanding of what grassroots organizing or organizations are. There is an active learning curve." They added, "One of the more important things I think philanthropy can do is actually take the time to educate ourselves about what it looks like to do the organizing work." That deeper understanding is critical. Funders, one person we interviewed said, need to "understand and value the importance of organizations building their capacity" and demonstrate "that we understand that that takes time and resources, and that we value when they do it." That devaluing of organizing has deep implications for our long-term ability to build community power. "I've had organizers say to me, why do funders question when we start to get bigger? Why can't there be an organizing group that is as big as the ACLU, if we're organizing people and building power?" one funder said. That example, they said, shows "one role that funders play in perpetuating the higher automatic valuation of policy work and other things compared to organizing work. And then that has a trickle-down effect in terms of funding decisions."

That same funder noted that BIPOC leaders are often held up to a higher level of scrutiny than their white counterparts, which leads to racial disparities in funding. The latter, they said, "can make a big ask, and that can create the conditions to have the right working conditions in their organization. Whereas a person of color making the same ask, there are questions and flags around that, and that leads to lower levels of funding and therefore lower capacity

and therefore more stressful working conditions."

Many of the funders we spoke with noted the need to move towards a trust-based philanthropy model. Trust-based philanthropy acknowledges that organizations know best what they need to sustain themselves and their work, and to grow—and the role of a funder is to support the organization's sustainability for the long-term. Having a "meaningful relationship" with a grantee, one funder said, would look like providing more flexible resources coupled with a "meaningful understanding of what someone's going through, what their strategy is." They continued: "And you're working hand-in-hand to help them meet that vision. That is transformational." For example, rather than dictating how an organization should function, funders should connect groups to the resources they need. One funder brought up how they work with their grantees to address capacity-building needs. Organizations, they said, share what they need, and then they "look through our vetted resource bank and we work with them and we make a plan with them." But, they added, "They don't have to do things our way."

Building this trust could be transformational, according to one funder. "Imagine a funder saying to an organization, 'I looked at your stuff, you've printed a report every year for 10, 15 years, I've seen the growth. Your work is aligned with what we want to do. And we're going to give you unrestricted funds for XYZ years, regardless of what you do. It's just to support what you're already doing,'" they said. "Imagine what kind of honesty and transparency you could have." To get to this place of trust, this funder said, relationships must be rebuilt. "There has been some really unfortunate history with funders, dropping in with funding and then leaving, not having strong relationships with their grantees and partners on the ground," they said. "There's a lot of reconciliation to be done between movement folks and foundation staff."

One positive development within philanthropy with respect to changing how organizing is viewed and supported is the increasing numbers of former organizers who have been hired as foundation staff. "We have seen recently a few more organizers moving into philanthropy. That was not that common a while ago. And I think that is transformative for philanthropy," one funder said. Without staff who deeply understand the organizing sector, one funder said, "It's just really difficult to develop strategy that's meaningful, that's going to be impactful."

In recent years, there has also been a movement within philanthropy for funders to recognize the power that they have. As one program officer put it to us, "We have power, and we need to own that." When it comes to improving working conditions for organizers, funders recognize that there is more they can do to move the needle. "I don't think many of us interrogate what an organizer makes or what kind of benefits people get," one funder said. They added: "It would be great if we did that as part of our practice." When funders don't ask questions about working conditions, another noted, "That's one way we might contribute at least indirectly" to poor working conditions. That should change, according to several of the funders we spoke with. "You could imagine philanthropy working together to say we should have a set of standard questions we ask about labor—do your staff have health insurance? Does your staff make enough money to not be rent-burdened," one funder said, adding, "I think that could be powerful."

Case study: Bay Area Power Building Funder Table

In 2019, a group of eight California Bay Area funders began convening under the umbrella of the Bay Area Power Building Funder Table, with the goal of exploring how their collective resources could be better aligned to invest in, build, and sustain grassroots community organizing for the long-term. As the Bay Area Power Building Funder Table puts it, this group of funders "aspires to more deeply understand and support the infrastructure and resources that are required to sustain and grow grassroots-driven, multi-issue, multi-racial community organizing and power building in our region."

Organizing campaigns are more powerful when groups working in coalition are united not only around the need for short-term wins but have a shared long-term strategy and vision. Similarly, the Bay Area Power Building Funder Table's guiding ethos is that a regional funders table with a common framework and a shared understanding of both the opportunities and challenges for community organizing and power-building is best positioned for maximum impact. As Hannah Garcia, Senior Program Officer at East Bay Community Foundation and co-chair of the Bay Area Power-Building Funders Table put it, "Funders committed to social justice have a responsibility to serve as movement-building and fundraising partners. Through support and participation in funder collaboratives, we can collectively expand investment in the organizing and infrastructure needed to build and sustain grassroots power over the long-term."

Still in its early stages, this process has not been a top-down, funder-driven process; rather, it has been conducted hand-in-hand and in partnership with leaders in the region's grassroots community organizing ecosystem. One of their first steps was to bring on a long-time Bay Area organizer to lead listening sessions and discussions with local grassroots leaders, who identified several key challenges to building long-term community power—and those challenges, unsurprisingly, centered around hiring, training, and retaining community organizers.

In 2022, the Bay Area Power Building Funder Table is continuing to partner with both executive directors of grassroots organizing groups and long-time community organizers to identify concrete recommendations and strategies around organizer hiring, training, and retention. Organizations were invited to participate in this planning phase as teams and received grant support to imagine and design solutions that, by the end of the planning process, will be ready for funding and implementation.

Ultimately, the Bay Area Power Building Funder Table hopes that their work, in deep relationship with grassroots community groups, will help move more resources to the community organizing sector, and ensure that funders are "responding as partners to those who are at the frontlines of building power and to what they need most," Garcia said.

Key takeaway #3: Funders and the broader philanthropy world should view the current challenges organizations are experiencing with retention and burnout as a crisis that necessitates a response—and shift how they operate.

a. The necessary culture shifts require a reconception of the purpose of foundations themselves.
b. Implementing change within foundations can be a slow-moving process—yet as the pandemic has shown, foundations can move swiftly to respond to urgent crises and needs.

"Funders play a big role, but we are not the ones who are supposed to be in charge."

"This money is not ours to begin with. The mass majority of wealth was built on the backs of Black and Brown people, and it should be redistributed at mass, without restriction."

Much like social change itself, shifting how philanthropy operates will be a long-term process, and one that requires investment from top leadership. As one program officer put it to us of organizing, "Real change, sustainable change doesn't happen overnight." The same can be said of how internal shifts happen within organizations and institutions.

The funders we interviewed believe that beyond just providing more resources to organizing groups and moving towards a trust-based model of philanthropy, the philanthropic sector needs to shift how they view their relationships to their grantees, from a top-down model to one where organizations are viewed as long-term partners, and one where funders are taking the lead from those organizations. "We should see ourselves as agents at the service of the movement," one funder said. They added, "We funders have to be able to have closer relationships with organizations that help us understand that, and help us support them. I think it's key for me that funders play a big role, but we are not the ones who are supposed to be in charge. So we should be careful, knowing that the role that we play is not to micromanage how organizations do things, to tell them what are the best practices, to tell them how to do stuff." Rather, they said, "Philanthropy should see itself as being an agent at the service of the organizations that are made up of people who are impacted by the issues, because they are the ones who should be and are leading the movement. And we play the role of transferring money that has been accumulated through exploitation and transferring it back for the work that they are doing for social justice." As another program officer put it, "This money is not ours to begin with. The mass majority of wealth was built on the backs of Black and Brown people, and it should be redistributed at mass, without restriction."

While the dominant framework when it comes to philanthropy continues to be a more top-down model, there have been encouraging signs in the past few years that funders can in fact move quickly to respond to urgent crises and take the lead from their grantee organizations. We should take the lessons learned to heart, with one of the chief lessons being that many of the supports that grantees were told were impossible turned out to be possible after all. One funder shared that at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, their foundation pooled together resources to create a rapid response fund for their grantees, as well as shared digital tools, training, and resources to help their grantees organize remotely. This same foundation, during the racial justice uprisings in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, also provided their grantees with funding and resources for mass mobilizations. Similarly, another foundation pivoted to COVID-19 response work, funding their grantees across the country to provide cash assistance for communities that were not included in the federal government's COVID-19 relief packages. This same funder also shared that in the aftermath of the racial justice uprisings in 2020, they also pivoted to a strategy of giving longer-term, general operating grants to Black-led organizations. "We have committed to that strategy," they said.

Undergirding these rapid response efforts is an understanding that, as one funder put it, "the best response to crisis is supporting long-term organizing," and trusting that grassroots organizing groups know what their communities need. As this funder put it, "Those organizations are the ones that are best located to respond to the crisis, and are trusted by people, and have the resources and the infrastructure." The success of the rapid-response efforts that began in 2020 show, this funder added, the power of building trust-based relationships between funders and organizations. Funders, they added, should see their role as "providing stability for organizing."

Yet taking the lead from their grantees and redistributing wealth does not mean that funders should not be clear about their positional power. In both the short- and medium-term, philanthropy is a critical part of the social change sector, and funders possess a large amount of agency and opportunity to work in partnership to improve labor standards in the organizing sector and to co-create the necessary infrastructure. It should be clear, from the results of our research with organizers and with directors of organizations, that funding—while a critical component—is only one part of what is needed to improve working conditions in our sector. At All Due Respect, we believe funders have a responsibility to think critically about how funds are being used, and a responsibility to help ensure their grantees are upholding fair labor standards.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: UNIONIZATION

Despite a general decline[22] in union membership in recent U.S. history, an uptick of labor actions[23] and organizing in new industries[24] has helped bring renewed attention to the power of unions. Regardless of low union density (which we should note is a product of concerted political attacks on the right to organize), the U.S. overall is experiencing its highest approval ratings[25] for unions since 1965, and 76 percent of the increase in new union membership in 2017 was workers under 35.

In recent years, the U.S. has seen a significant rise in unionizing in unsuspected industries, and in particular to ADR's scope of inquiry, nonprofits. A younger, largely white-collar movement has pushed unions to adapt from traditional trade organizing models, which we see today with News Guilds in support of digital media organizing, Communications Workers of America (CODE-CWA) in the tech industry, United Auto Workers in support of grad students and museum workers, and the Nonprofit Professional Employees Union (NPEU) within progressive nonprofit organizations. As just one example, NPEU (International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers Local 70) now represents 32 shops—14 of which unionized in 2020 alone, according to statistics from the NPEU.

In a time of racial reckoning, public health crisis, stagnant wages, crippling debt, and a demand for safe, dignified, and sustained work, the possibility of needed progressive labor reforms is fueling a growing movement in the nonprofit sector to meet the needs of its workers that have long been neglected.[26] From Amnesty International[27] to Amazon, momentum and solidarity in new and old industries alike are challenging traditional trade unions to expand support toward new membership bases, while the U.S. has also seen new unions emerge[28] to take the lead in building worker power in these growing industries.

Though the private sector remains relatively un-unionized, with only 6 percent[29] of its workers belonging to a union, these efforts come during a time when the COVID-19 pandemic, the Great Resignation, and the labor demands of essential workers are weighted with the uncertainty of the future of work and workplaces. Unions provide an obvious avenue for voice and some semblance of self-determination for organizers in the field who have experienced new ways of organizing that require better supports and clearer delineation of roles.

Though union organizing in progressive, base building movements is gaining momentum,

22 See: https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.toc.htm
23 See: https://striketracker.ilr.cornell.edu
24 See: https://wamu.org/story/20/05/13/the-pandemic-is-inspiring-a-wave-of-unionization-efforts-will-it-lead-to-greater-protections
25 See: https://news.gallup.com/poll/354455/approval-labor-unions-highest-point-1965.aspx
26 See: https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/08/the-plight-of-the-overworked-nonprofit-employee/497081
27 See: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/sep/20/amnesty-international-staff-vote-on-strike-action-over-redundancies
28 See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/02/04/workers-are-forming-unions-nonprofits-thinktanks-their-bosses-arent-always-happy
29 See: https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf

the workplace issues faced in the social justice field have long been called into question by staff and, in particular, organizers. Labor journalist Sarah Jaffe[30] describes the exploitation of workers that occurs when happiness and self-worth are valued through work. The nonprofit field is particularly susceptible to this as an industry that depends on the emotional labor and deep commitment to the mission that keeps workers on the line, despite the irregular hours, poor conditions, and limited pay and benefits. Nonprofits have sometimes weaponized their mission-driven work to explain away substandard working conditions as part of the price workers must pay for their commitment to social change.

There have been previous efforts to improve working conditions for organizers—most notably, the work of the National Organizers Alliance (NOA). Established in 1992, NOA's mission was to advance progressive organizing for social, economic and environmental justice and to sustain, support and nurture the people of all ages who do it. NOA was charged with developing best practices and long-term sustainability mechanisms, while critically grappling with worker issues such as globalization and inequities perpetuated by white supremacy and capitalism. NOA created a centralized pension plan, for progressive movement organizers who otherwise were not well supported by an under-resourced field or suffered from the inequitable value nonprofits place on their "professional" employees, such as lawyers or communications and development specialists, over the skillset and time of organizers.

We know that unionization is a powerful and necessary tool for workers in nonprofits, as for workers in other fields. Forming a union can alter the balance of power within the workplace, guaranteeing basic protections against mistreatment and firing and raising minimum compensation levels, among many other positive outcomes. Unionized nonprofit workers have won[31] higher minimum salaries, better pay transparency, increased employee participation in decision-making, and more. Employees understand their union drives as ways of strengthening their organizations and saving their employers the costs associated with high turnover.[32]

However, unionization also has limitations in addressing problems within nonprofits. Forming a union doesn't change the total amount of resources available to an organization. There is a significant difference between demanding that a trillion-dollar company like Amazon pay its workers, versus the same demand being made of a nonprofit organizing group with limited resources. Additionally, it can be very difficult for unionization to solve some problems in workplace culture. It can, in some cases, inflame tensions. Forming a union draws lines and distinctions within an organization between managers and workers in the bargaining unit, which can change the dynamic of the workplace, especially in community organizations where all staff share a small office and weekly meetings. There are often mismatched expectations among both rank-and-file staff, as well as management, that forming a union is the end goal, rather than the beginning of an ongoing process to collectively improve working conditions.

From our research, organizers described unions as an important tool for accountability and equity, but also described the attempts to unionize as a contributing factor to burnout

30 See: Sarah Jaffe, "Work Won't Love You Back," 2021
31 See: https://www.thestrikewave.com/original-content/inside-the-wave-of-nonprofit-organizing
32 Ibid.

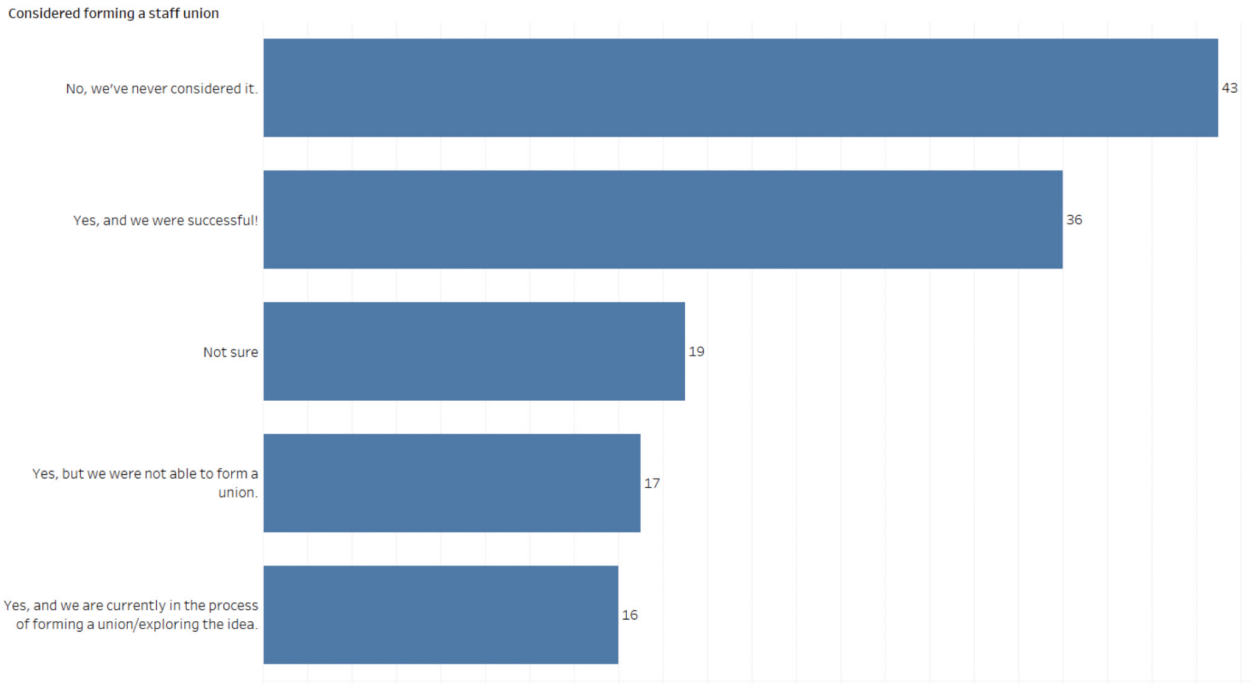
and increased tensions with their organizations. Organizers' experiences with unionization varied—while unions were recognized by organizers as an important tool to improve workplace conditions, many expressed frustrations with how the unionization process has played out within their organization. Organizers cannot be the only ones looking out for their own best interest, and unions play a crucial role in addressing structural problems around wages and benefits. Unionizing can also be a demanding and draining process on organizers attempting to form a shop, and sometimes even winning a union does not fully address demands from organizers, especially those demands related to the organization's culture.

Key takeaway #1: Increasingly, young organizers are looking to unionization as a way to address poor working conditions, which seems to be connected at some level to a generational shift toward a more positive view of unions on the whole.

a. There is increased awareness by rank-and-file workers that social change jobs do not excuse exploitative behavior by bosses or organizations.
b. Forming a union is a more accessible, and more legible, form of asserting rights in the workplace for organizers and nonprofit employees than it was a decade ago.

"We need, as the left, to commit to unionize and have a unionized workforce. We need to accept that the work and the change we're trying to create is going to take a pretty long time, and it's going to need us."

In our research, we found that a surprising number of organizers in their first few years of organizing work had either considered forming a staff union or had already been a part of a staff unionization effort. Ten years ago, these numbers would have been unimaginable. Overall, at the time they completed the survey, over 40 percent of respondents were part of a union, in the process of negotiating a union contract, or exploring the idea of forming a union.



There is a clear and growing desire on the part of workers for fair wages, benefits, and a voice at their workplace. A good job, one organizer told us, would be a unionized one, "with a lot of collective bargaining power." One organizer whose workplace is in the midst of forming a union shared that they believed it would lead to better work standards. "We need, as the left, to commit to unionize and have a unionized workforce. We need to accept that the work and the change we're trying to create is going to take a pretty long time, and it's going to need us," they said. For them, unionization would help professionalize organizing jobs. "I would love to see organizing be a job with a union and with some type of job security and a pension, the way like teaching is. It's our profession, and I'd love to see it be a profession." This is a perspective that one executive director whose staff recently unionized shared with us during our interview. Of unionization, they said, "I think that's going to be a growing trend and that's a good thing." They added, "For us, it's a no-brainer, of course we're going to support that. What we fight for on the outside, we obviously have to reflect on the inside." Another executive director whose staff also recently unionized—and who supported that process—shared a similar perspective. "It's really a test for us of how we live our values," they said. For them, the main concern was to make sure that unionization "strengthened the organization through this process."

This uptick in unionization efforts amongst organizers may be partially explained by a growing generational favorability toward unions, but it does not explain the root causes of why so many community organizers feel compelled to form unions. This wave of unionization, and the increased interest in unionization in the nonprofit and organizing sectors, is coming from increased awareness by rank-and-file workers that social change jobs do not excuse exploitative behavior on the part of management. Unions are now a viable option as they become more accessible mechanisms for organizers to assert workplace rights for organizers than it was 10 years ago. Though mission-driven, the nonprofit sector has been slow to address internal working conditions and labor rights, where leaders do not always

believe unions are a good fit for their culture.[33] As one organizer told us, "It's my opinion that unions and nonprofits can be some of the most exploitative employers out there, because they know that organizers have a deep passion for the work they do." Unions, they said, can help protect rank-and-file workers at these organizations: "All union staff and organizers should have a staff union. In my experience, if you don't have a collective bargaining agreement to prevent your employer from taking advantage of this, they will." Another organizer echoed this. "I think the most important thing any worker can do to improve their conditions is to organize a union, organizers including," this organizer said, adding, "I think it's important for staff unions at mission-driven organizations to share the overall mission of the organization, and to advance it by advocating for the needs of the staff."

Key takeaway #2: Unionization efforts have led to positive change like higher wages and improved benefits— but have also led to unintended consequences.

a. Forming a union is not just about improved wages and benefits, but also about fostering a culture of workplace democracy.
b. At times, mismatched expectations of what organizing a union will mean versus the practical workplace effects can leave both rank-and-file staff and directors with less power and less energy for the work than at the outset.

"The union was the best part of the job, kept the organization accountable, and got us better pay and benefits."

Forming and belonging to a union can be deeply rewarding for its members and their organizations. Many organizers who had successfully unionized their workplaces or found employment in already unionized organizations noted that the union won them better wages and benefits, as well as more sustainable organizational policies. "I would say that all of the positive things at the organization—wages, benefits, comp time—are due to our strong contract and worker solidarity," one organizer at a group with a long-standing staff union said. As another organizer put it, "The union was the best part of the job, kept the organization accountable, and got us better pay and benefits."

Organizers also expressed a shared understanding that unions are more than about increased wages—that they are not only to secure rights, but to build relationships, trust, and solidarity in a workplace community that has a larger impact on the well-being of your colleagues and the field as a whole. When the experience is not met with hostility from management, or is allowed the space to take root and grow, the value and appreciation for the power unions bring to its members, to have difficult conversations about work expectations, and to improve the conditions and thus the work, was shared. "The union was here already, and I have had a great experience being a part of it," one organizer told us.

33 See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/02/04/workers-are-forming-unions-nonprofits-thinktanks-their-bosses-arent-always-happy

Another organizer described the process of exploring a unionization effort as “one of the best experiences I have had at the job.”

But organizers and directors also shared that unionizing can take a serious toll on those who undergo the process, on both the members and management side. The resources, confrontation, and challenge of power and interpersonal dynamics can all have a lasting impact. One executive director shared, for example, that the unionization process has introduced a confrontational element into the workplace, one that they believed did not exist before. “I really think we have a good culture, but also what we’re finding is that we have new organizers from different cultures that were toxic, that weren’t the best,” they said. “And now it’s really set us off, in a way, that has them not trusting management, even though they’ve known me for years.”

Survey respondents who are currently a part of a union, would like to be part of a union, or who tried to unionize, shared a wide range of responses that captured major challenges with respect to unionization. Though one in four respondents were a part of a union, very few shared solely positive remarks when asked to explain their experience in forming or being a part of it. A general tone of exhaustion and disappointment was expressed in dealing with leaders who claim certain values externally that do not align internally and who do not live up to their own standards. Several respondents also shared that the process of organizing a union can actually contribute to burnout among already taxed organizers. “It was exhausting,” one organizer said of their organization’s union drive. “We’d meet secretly by Zoom at 11 p.m. after our campaign work was done for the day.” At other times, burnout has prevented organizers from beginning the unionization process. “Staff considered it, but not seriously, as everyone was too burned out at the time,” one organizer said. “Workers are often too drained to unionize,” another organizer noted.

But even unsuccessful unionization efforts can lead to positive outcomes. Survey respondents shared that failed campaigns opened lines of communication to discuss improved conditions. Union organizing tactics can create an adversarial dynamic that sometimes does not end in the creation of a union; it does, however, force management and boards to assess their practices and consider what change might be necessary to maintain the integrity of their mission and respect of their staff. One organizer shared that they joined the organization after previous staff left following an unsuccessful union drive. While the drive had failed, they said, “As part of the fallout, the board increased wages and benefits for the remaining staff and for new hires.” Another organizer told us that staff at an organization they ultimately left is continuing to “discuss these issues openly and transparently” with organizational leadership.

Case study: Lessons From How One Executive Director Navigated the Unionization Process

In 2021, employees of the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) came together to form a union in the hope of securing sustainable, fair-paying jobs. CIRC describes[34] itself as a "statewide, membership-based coalition of immigrant, faith, labor, youth, community, business, and ally organizations," with the goal of "making Colorado a more welcoming, immigrant-friendly state." Many of their organizers have direct ties to the immigrant communities the organization serves, and several are DACA recipients.

In forming a union with the Denver Newspaper Guild, CIRC staff demanded improved wages, job security, and clarity on roles and responsibilities. According to an analysis conducted by the organization, CIRC was 35 percent behind in wages compared to peer organizations, with unclear pathways to promotions and raises. Many staff also wanted a formal acknowledgment of job security due to their precarious legal status in the U.S., and believed a union contract would both protect their rights as immigrant workers and be aligned with CIRC's mission to promote the dignity and human rights of every person, regardless of immigration status.

When the CIRC Union Organizing Committee requested voluntary recognition of their union last year, it came during a period of leadership transition. CIRC's new Executive Director, Lisa Duran, had stepped into the leadership role at CIRC in the midst of the unionization campaign. Duran, who first became an organizer in the Chicano Movement, described her values as rooted in resistance to oppression and centered on caring for community. "I am the product of a union family. I love unions," Duran said. This made her an ideal leader for the process, as it allowed her to approach unionizing efforts by CIRC staff with a shared fundamental appreciation for the value of unions.

As part of this process, Duran said she had to reconcile her own experience of overwork and burnout as a young organizer. Duran, who is 61 years old, identified as being the product of a generation whose predominant organizing culture was that of martyrdom, where the harder and longer you worked, the more you were valued. Duran herself burned out as an organizer due to the culture of overwork—and along the way, she witnessed the disconnect between internal and external organizational behaviors when it came to how organizers were treated. At one point, Duran worked at a labor rights organization whose executive director pushed for a 60-hour work week; Duran recalled intervening when a respected colleague's commitment was questioned after she expressed her struggle to connect to the work due to exhaustion. Yet according to Duran, even this experience didn't shift her own practices and her mindset that being an organizer required self-sacrifice. "Nobody ever talked about sustainability," Duran said. "I'm grateful to be at CIRC, because in my generation, it was almost seen as a lack of commitment, and to see people being serious about [sustainability] actually gave me hope."

Still, she found it difficult at times to reconcile staff demands with her own experience as an organizer, as well as now as an executive director who must think about the organization's

34 See: https://coloradoimmigrant.org/about

budget, legal responsibilities, and report to the board—and while Duran attempted to bring the values of collaboration, trust, and transparency to the process, she was at times in conflict with CIRC staff. Union organizing models typically encourage an adversarial relationship between management and rank-and-file staff, a dynamic that is effective in many corporate settings but can be contradictory to the values of small, grassroots organizations. This dynamic was sometimes at play during CIRC's unionization process. Early on, Duran took more time to conduct due diligence on voluntary recognition of the staff union than the CIRC staff wanted, a move that the bargaining unit believed was intended to stall the unionization effort. In response, staff organized a direct action against Duran. Rather than take a traditional approach (i.e., negotiate indirectly through lawyers), Duran instead addressed the staff directly to share that time, patience, and open dialogue to understand each other would be essential in order to strengthen the organization and build community through the unionization process. She recalled sharing with staff: "Many of you have said you want to make a difference in your communities, in our communities, and that's going to require us to really know and respect each other. You may not like my point of view, but it's very important you hear it. And we need each other. We are not going to make change without each other."

Staff appreciated this candor, which led to a more collaborative process that included a collective and transparent overview of the organizational budget to discuss realistic salary increases. This approach to collectively working through an issue built a level of transparency and trust, which are not typical traits in traditional leadership-employee relations. Duran knew, however, that this approach would be fundamental to the sustainability and increased strength of CIRC for years to come, regardless of leadership. According to Duran, prior to her time as CIRC's executive director, "there was a culture…of a lack of transparency, lack of communication, lack of a clear structure and decision-making process," and staff were frustrated. Having a staff union and a concrete union contract has begun to address many of those frustrations, with long-term benefits. "The union contract is huge for our sustainability and strength," Duran said. "It's been a godsend, and I think it's going to [continue] to be good for the organization after I leave."

Ultimately, the CIRC Union contract won important victories—it included increased wages across the organization, improved health care benefits, the implementation of a 36-hour workweek, generous vacation time, parental leave, sick leave, additional annual personal days, and an eight-week paid sabbatical leave available to employees after four years of employment. Importantly, there is now a culture of and an expectation for rest that applies to all levels of the organization. Duran herself shared that as a result of this culture shift, she would be taking time off for a religious holiday for the first time in her life. "My faith is very important to me, but I always put work first. And I literally said, 'Okay everyone, I'm taking off Wednesday afternoon, yay union contract!" Duran said. The cultural shift, she said, gives everyone "permission to rest, to take flex time." She added, "It feels good to think that I don't have to burn myself out to be a part of this organization." The union has also led to other efforts to improve organizational culture, such as the creation of a Racial Justice Committee made up of staff from all levels of the organization. Notably, there have been other positive benefits outside of the bargaining process—due in part to the increased power gained by staff through the unionization process, CIRC organizers also were able to push for a significant role in the organization's strategic planning process.

The Denver Newspaper Guild has a proven commitment to unionizing the nonprofit sector and has been successful throughout Colorado. But based on her experience at CIRC, Duran advised that the goal of labor organizations should be, as she put it, "to creatively think

about the role of the worker in the modern workforce and how to build community," moving beyond "stodgy" practices that reflect a lack of imagination about the full scope of worker needs and worker power. Labor unions must change how they operate, especially when it comes to unionizing nonprofits, Duran said. "The one thing I don't like about union culture is that it's very adversarial," she said, adding, "It's assuming that management is out to screw the workers, and it's assuming the workers won't be respected by management, and it just doesn't work."

She also shared that the wave of unionization has shown a need for increased resources at organizing institutions. According to Duran, CIRC saw no major response from their funders in response to the unionization campaign, despite the increase in resources needed to fully meet the needs of the organization's staff. "We are doing a foundation campaign with funders to say that you need to fund us because we unionized, and this is the direct result—it is good for the organization, it's good for the workers, it's good for the directors, but we need you, funders, to step up," Duran said. She added, "To worry we are not going to meet our budget is very disheartening."

By almost all respects, she said, CIRC is a better organization due to its staff union, and she hopes their experience will show other organizations in the grassroots sector that unions can have a hugely beneficial impact in our workplaces. Because of the staff union, she said, "Morale is higher." Duran added, "I don't believe that we are not as productive—I think we are more productive. I know I am. Everyone is very committed and passionate."

Key takeaway #3: Organizers who attempt to unionize their workplaces often face union-busting efforts similar to those in the corporate private sector.

a. Even in places where management is supportive of unionization efforts and voluntarily recognizes the union, bargaining a contract is always a long process with demands on both sides.

"Although our organization claims to be union-friendly, they have failed to compromise with the union on almost every issue."

Several respondents who participated in union drive efforts, whether successful or not, shared similar experiences as corporate, private sector union drives that resulted in hostility from management, drawn-out legal processes, and other perceived union-busting tactics.[35] According to our survey, 12 percent of respondents were interested in forming a union but not able to do so either due to their organization's size or models, or because of retaliation, intimidation, burnout, or, as one organizer put it, a "generic liberal hostility to labor" within their organization. When asked to share their experience in attempting to unionize, open-ended responses to our survey highlighted the frustration organizers felt when social justice value signaling contradicts employee treatment and workplace conditions.

35 See: https://organizing.work/2019/11/progressives-in-the-streets-union-busters-in-the-sheets

One organizer shared that after their successful union drive, staff involved in the effort were "blacklisted from the campaign." Another organizer shared that at a previous organization, they were fired after attempting to start a union. "It was straight-up union-busting," they said.

Hostility from management takes a wide variety of forms, and at other times, management can delay the process or otherwise impede the union. One survey respondent shared that during their unionization effort, "key leaders within the bargaining unit quickly received promotions to management," which they said "made the union less feasible" and "circumvented the formation of a union." Sometimes, the hostility is more overt. One organizer who successfully unionized along with their coworkers described contract negotiations with management as "an incredibly grueling process." They continued: "Negotiations were like pulling teeth, and watching the hypocrisy of our local union leadership in contract negotiations was infuriating. For example, we wanted a non-discrimination article in our contract. Union management fought us tooth and nail, telling us they didn't want to have a non-discrimination article in the contract that would be subject to grievances." Another organizer who successfully formed a union with their coworkers shared that two years later, a contract has yet to be agreed upon. "Although our organization claims to be union-friendly, they have failed to compromise with the union on almost every issue," they said.

On a different note, even when directors are supportive of unionization efforts for their staff, they often feel compelled to differentiate—not altogether incorrectly—between the material conditions of the workplaces they lead and the working conditions of the members of the organization. As one director told us during an interview, "We're an organization where the majority of our members work for extremely low wages, have no benefits, no pensions. And that representation is on our board. So we have a perspective on what are some really tough working conditions and retaliation." This is not an inaccurate description in most places, but it is a mindset that tends to treat unionization in nonprofit organizations as somehow less authentic or less worthy than organizing a union among workers being paid below or at the minimum wage.

Key takeaway #4: Unions can and should be part of the solution, but are not a silver bullet to fix poor working conditions.

a. A lot of what organizers want to see changed in their workplace is difficult to achieve through the bargaining process, which means that wages might increase, but some of the desires around transparency and decision-making still feel unfulfilled in the end.
b. Unionizing isn't a one-off event—when a union drive and subsequent contract is viewed as the end of the road rather than a long-term vehicle for workplace democracy, frustrations with unions can emerge.
c. Unions themselves are adapting to figure out how to organize and represent these workers, and it can be a challenge to understand the specific needs and wants of this sector compared to other industries.

In our research, we found that many organizers, while believing in the necessity of unions as a way to improve labor conditions, also highlighted fundamental challenges faced in building and maintaining power within a workplace once a union is organized and a contract is negotiated.

In traditional organizing models, unions create a culture of solidarity that has to be maintained by its members. Experiences shared by organizers detailed a perception that unions were not as effective as respondents hoped. As one organizer told us, "Yes, we successfully formed a union. However, the union was very weak, had no striking power, and was effectively useless with regards to grievances." (They noted, however, that the union "did help us get a slight raise.")

It is clear from the survey that the erosion of labor protections, burnout among organizers, and typical union-busting tactics such as prolonged negotiations, direct dealing, and promoting staff out of the union are direct contributing factors to frustrations with unions. Additionally, when unions are seen as service providers rather than a collective power made up of its members, that can lead to a belief that unions are inactive or ineffective. As one unionized organizer told us, "The union is definitely helpful to have, but we have learned the hard way that it is only as strong as its members. And therefore, it has been hard to make substantial changes for organizer salaries and protections."

Another overarching theme that emerged in our research was the sense that social justice organizations are not an easy fit for traditional labor unions that are relatively new to organizing nonprofits. Survey respondents cite small staff sizes; short-term campaign staffing; unclear job descriptions and duties that limit unit sizes; complicated structures such as fiscal sponsorship, intermediaries, and c3/c4 contingencies; remote work; and fundraising reliance as perceived barriers to unionizing or that complicate effective representation and organizing approaches. One organizer recalled being told by a union that their organization was "too small, and they would not be willing to go to bat for us," which was one factor that stalled the unionization process.

At times, staff at smaller organizations considering unionizing determine that there are other ways to achieve their goals. As one survey respondent shared, "When I was an organizer, we considered a few proposals, but decided it was not the form that would increase democratic practice across the organization. Partially, we were a very small organization—and we were able to get the changes we wanted."

One executive director whose staff recently unionized cautioned that unions need to do a better job of organizing with values and dignity, and not take an aggressive "us versus them" approach. In their experience, the union that had organized their workplace had shared "false ideas of what a union can bring" with staff. Additionally, they had seen how the unionization process that had played out in a separate state-wide organization had led to claims that staff were fired in retaliation. "I'm not saying like that we shouldn't have principled fights, and that we shouldn't address problems, but I have seen that side of [unionization] that is very divisive and toxic," they said, adding, "It has to be done with a lot of integrity."

Several organizers cautioned that unionizing was only one piece of the puzzle, and that having supportive leadership and management, a healthy organizational culture, and sufficient resources were also key in improving working conditions. Unions alone cannot fix the internal culture of nonprofits. One organizer at an organization with a staff union shared that being in a union hadn't prevented several coworkers from being fired for what they believed were non-fireable offenses. Another shared that despite having a union and good benefits on paper, they still didn't feel that they were "supported to advocate for themselves" and to take necessary time off.

An electoral campaign organizer noted that while unionizing has led to improvements in working conditions in their field, it hasn't been a silver bullet. "We are moving to a place where more campaigns are unionized," they said, which has "resulted in higher wages." "Having things like unions definitely helps," they said, but issues still remain: "People have more time off and people are definitely paid a lot better than I was, but our organizers are not any happier." And they raised an important point that unionization must be coupled with an increase in the resources that an organization or campaign receives. "It's not like when the McDonald's CEO is like, we can't pay people more," they said. "There is a real question of what resources we have."

The uptick in union drives in the grassroots organizing sector is not likely to stop anytime soon, especially as we face permanent changes in the way we work in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is in the best interest of organizations and the broader social change sector to interrogate the effects of unionization efforts with an eye toward both supporting union efforts and the ultimate goal of raising labor standards and changing workplace culture.

From our research, it emerged that unionization can be both a critical way to build workplace democracy, improve wages and benefits, and strengthen an organization—and it can also often be a fraught process for grassroots organizing groups. For staff who wish to form a union, there are often expectations about the process that are sometimes not achieved by the formation of a staff union. Traditional unions and typical union tactics may not always be a good fit for grassroots groups. Even for executive directors who are supportive of unions and their staff, there is often an undercurrent of "the staff don't understand how hard it is to run an organization," and most have never been on the management side of a union drive. Funders on the outside of an organization may perceive a unionization drive as a sign that the organization is badly run, seeing the need for a staff union as proof of a problem rather than a regular exercise of worker power and a critical way to strengthen an organization.

We have work to do to ensure that unions doing the organizing are well-suited to the effort, that rank-and-file organizers feel clear on the opportunities and the constraints of union drives, that directors feel supported to engage in the process in good faith, and that funders support organizations that are unionizing, rather than interpreting a union effort solely as a sign of dysfunctional workplace culture. At All Due Respect, as we move from our research phase into our implementation phase, we will be further exploring how to equip organizers, executive directors, and funders with tools to help them navigate the unionization process, with the hope of ultimately strengthening organizations for the long-term.

Interventions to Explore and Next Steps for All Due Respect

"While campaign success depends on the drive and self-organization of those affected, good working conditions matter in allowing the organizer to better focus on the work, feel support and carry their head high, without carrying an additional set of concerns."

"We need to rethink the entire system. It's not as simple as just adding a couple more perks. Wages definitely do need to go up. We definitely do need better benefits, but I don't think that in and of itself will solve some of the underlying problems."

"How can I continue doing this work into my sixties and into my seventies, but in a way that isn't making me sick? It would mean that our movements would radically have to shift. We'd have to have more spaciousness for our families, for our health. It would mean that we are continuously adaptive and creative, and carry a lot of the things that we've done in the pandemic into the future."

Based on our research, it is clear that both structural changes *and* a culture shift are necessary to raise labor standards for organizers. Many of the challenges identified by organizers—and echoed by executive directors—have no easy fixes, and will require longer-term work to shift both movement-wide culture and practices, as well as those of the broader society. That is, if it needs to be said, a much bigger project—but at All Due Respect, we believe that intentional structural interventions, such as efforts to raise wages and institute practices that lead to a culture of well-being, are critical first steps toward bringing organizers, directors, and funders into a place where they can co-create a new set of movement practices.

Much in the same way that master labor agreements have been used in other industries to institute sector-wide fair pay and benefits structures—negotiated and agreed upon by both employers and employees—this project seeks to find the same type of co-created codes of conduct that ensure:

1. Employees are supported in their jobs;
2. Organizations have the resources to build their teams for the long haul; and
3. Funders know they're investing in organizations that practice what they preach, and that have the staff (both in numbers and experience) they need to win campaigns.

To those ends, All Due Respect has compiled a list of concrete interventions, based on both our report findings as well as research on best practices and vetted by organizers, directors, and funders, that we believe have the potential to prevent and course-correct the cycle of churn and burn experienced by so many organizers throughout the country.

Possible Interventions:

1. **Guidebook of standard working conditions:** From our research, it emerged that working conditions and organizational policies varied widely from one organization to the next. During our research interviews, multiple directors also noted the lack of a consistent method to get data on sustainable jobs and wage standards. While we understand that conditions are often based on external factors such as funding and local cost of living, a handbook of baseline workplace standards would help organizations determine whether their policies are in line with movement-wide standards. Similar to how the National Organizers Alliance's 2001 guide "Practice What We Preach" documented best and worst practices for community organizing groups, this guidebook would outline basic expectations for salaries, benefits, and working conditions. The standards would be created and tested in partnership with a set of organizations that reflect a range of attributes and needs, including size, geography, and issue focus.

2. **"Good Jobs" employer certification:** We propose creating a process of certification, by which a decision-making body made up of community organizations and organizers agree together on a set of standards that would publicly constitute a "good jobs" employer.[36] It is important to note that this should not function as another mechanism for funders to gatekeep funding from organizations. Rather, funders and community organizations should co-create a process by which organizations that do not meet those set standards receive the support they need to improve their practices. This potential certification should serve only as a carrot, not as a stick; we do not intend to create a new set of obstacles for organizations to meet their budget needs

3. **Training and resources focused on BIPOC organizer recruitment and retention:** We will develop a training module for the recruitment and retention of BIPOC organizers, targeted to directors and hiring managers. This training would build upon the lessons learned during our research, complement existing training programs and organizations, and would educate directors on how to improve recruitment and development of organizers of color.[37] To be clear, these trainings are not what are commonly described now as "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" trainings, which can sometimes be conducted to give the appearance that organizations and institutions take race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and other aspects of identity into

36 As noted in the report "Staffing the Mission," a similar effort exists in the United Kingdom, where the Living Wage Foundation certifies both "Living Wage Employers" as well as "Living Wage Funders." "Staffing the Mission" notes that this certification has resulted in 6,000-plus workers receiving pay raises, and has also led to better retention of staff. For more, see "Staffing the Mission" and www.livingwage.org.uk.

37 Numerous organizations, including re:power and Midwest Academy, offer valuable training opportunities; we also heard from multiple directors and organizers about the need to develop more recruitment and training programs specifically within grassroots organizations.

account in their work, when what is needed is a deeper assessment and overhaul of both institutional practices and interpersonal dynamics. Rather, we intend these trainings to go beyond mere discussion, and translate into action by tailoring training specifically to the needs of organizations and their teams.

4. **Guidelines for fiscal sponsors and philanthropy serving organizations (PSOs):** Fiscal sponsor organizations and PSOs play a large role in setting the back office and HR policies of thousands of movement organizations. We would create a best-practices guide for these intermediaries, including a commitment to not offering a set of wage and benefit options that don't meet basic standards. This could also include PSOs offering technical support to help projects become high-road organizations as part of their fiscal sponsor fee.

5. **Pooled resources:** Recognizing that organizations have varying access to resources, we propose funders explore the creation of pooled funds to support state-based organizations with resources to increase salary pay scales and benefits. This could look like multiple institutions with similar geographic and/or issue-based priorities pooling resources as a joint effort, or program officers within one institution combining funds from their pipelines to support grantees to improve working conditions for their teams. Pooled funds may be a key way to increase resources for directors who want to better support their staff, as well as demonstrate a joint commitment within philanthropic spaces to shift the culture of how we view overhead and infrastructure costs.

6. **Political parties:** Since electoral campaigns are the primary entry point into organizing work for many people, labor expectations and standards set by state parties and political campaigns are essential markers for how new (and often young) organizers conceive of the work's relative sustainability. This intervention could add to the work led by organizations like the Campaign Workers Guild, with the goals of: continuing to think critically about labor standards within electoral contexts, improving the recruitment processes of electoral organizers, and providing avenues for retention and advancement beyond a single electoral cycle.

7. **Unionization study:** As an increasing number of organizers form staff unions in their workplace, we intend to work alongside organizers and directors who have gone through a unionization process to better understand the expectations and outcomes, the information that might have helped them at the outset of the unionization effort, what's needed for unions and union reps to understand the context of community organizing groups, and think about a set of tools and resources that All Due Respectcould offer to organizing shops considering unionization.

Pilot projects:

The research component of All Due Respect was always intended to lay the groundwork for a set of pilot projects in the field, conducted in partnership with cohorts of interested funders, organizations, and organizers and testing out variations of the interventions listed above. In organizing work, the "research action" phase is a key component of building a successful campaign. As All Due Respect moves from research action into a set of pilot projects, our team is excited to work alongside a set of partners to begin testing the interventions we believe will begin to address some of the systemic challenges our sector faces in improving working conditions. In an ideal scenario, pilot projects will last for nine months to a year, at which point we will share insights from the pilot projects with a learning community of organizers, directors, and funders. We hope to generate a second round of pilot projects as well.

In Conclusion

In our surveys and interviews with organizers, it became abundantly clear that all we need to think more creatively about what is possible in our movement. When asked about what changes they would make if they had a magic wand to improve working conditions, organizers had trouble imagining possible solutions beyond fairly basic requests for higher wages and more transparent workplace cultures. This is a problem. We count on organizers to be motivating, inspiring, and unflappable, and yet, we've created a set of circumstances in which they struggle to play that role for themselves and their comrades and colleagues. It's up to all of us to re-align our priorities and put the needs of organizers at the forefront of our work.

As we enter into Phase 2 of All Due Respect, where we will pilot, test, and evaluate our proposed interventions, we hope you will join us in asking these big and complex questions, and sit with us as we wrestle with the answers.

Appendix

Organizer Survey

ALL DUE RESPECT Survey for Organizers

Community Organizers are the backbone of our progressive movement. They do the unglamorous work of building a better and more just country, one member at a time. But the work is hard and organizers often burn out after just a few years.

To protect this necessary work, we have to protect our organizers. That's why we're working with funders, organizational leaders, and organizers to set new labor standards, so that organizers—no matter their race, gender, or geography—get a fair wage and a fair shake.

To do this, we're taking it to the source and talking to organizers across the country to really understand the best ways that we can improve their working conditions. And we need your help. Please take the survey below to help shape the movement to improve community organizing!

0. PARTICIPATION CRITERIA QUESTIONS

Which of these best describes your organizing experience? Check the option that best applies.

- ❑ Currently working as a paid organizer
- ❑ No longer working as a paid organizer, but recently worked (within the last 3 years) as an organizer
- ❑ Worked as a paid organizer more than three years ago
- ❑ Worked as an unpaid organizing
- ❑ Currently working as an unpaid organizer

This survey is being conducted to better understand labor conditions within the organizing profession. The survey should take 20-30 minutes to complete. Participation in this survey is voluntary. You do not have to answer all the questions if you do not wish to and may stop the survey at any time. The individual information you provide in this survey will never be shared with anyone outside the research team. Please be assured that all the information you provide will remain completely confidential and never used in any way to permit identification of you. All information provided will be reported in aggregate form only, never revealing the identity of any participant. It is, however, your opportunity to share your experiences and ideas for change.If you have any questions or concerns about this research or your rights as someone taking the survey, you may contact kevin@allduerespectproject.org. By continuing, you consent to participating in this survey. Thank you so much for your contribution to this important work.

ii. Consent to participate

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

1. ABOUT YOU!

Before you begin: Please answer the following questions about ONE job or position (ideally your CURRENT or MOST RECENT organizing position). If you are at a brand new job, think about the job you held before your new position.

1. Please share your contact information

- ❑ Name (optional)
- ❑ Role or Title
- ❑ Organization Name
- ❑ City /Town:
- ❑ State:
- ❑ Website
- ❑ Email (personal email preferred)
- ❑ Phone

2. What is your race and/or ethnicity?

- ❑ Asian American, Asian
- ❑ Black or African American
- ❑ Caribbean or West Indian
- ❑ Hispanic or Latino/a/x
- ❑ Indigenous or Native American
- ❑ Middle Eastern or Arab
- ❑ Other (please specify) _____
- ❑ Pacific Islander
- ❑ South Asian
- ❑ South West Asian and North African
- ❑ White
- ❑ Multi-racial/mixed race

3. I identify as

- ❑ Cis woman
- ❑ Cis man
- ❑ Trans woman
- ❑ Trans man
- ❑ Genderqueer/Gender fluid
- ❑ Non-binary
- ❑ Two-Spirit (this identity only applies to people who identify as Indigenous/Native American/American Indian)
- ❑ Intersex
- ❑ Any other description of your gender?

_____

4. If we quote you, what pronouns would you like us to use?

- ❑ She/Her/Hers
- ❑ They/Them/Their
- ❑ Other (please specify) _____
- ❑ He/Him/His

5. What best describes your position?

- ❑ Labor organizer
- ❑ Field organizer
- ❑ Digital organizer
- ❑ Other: _____

6. How many years have you worked as an organizer?

- ❑ Less than 1 year
- ❑ 7-9 years
- ❑ 1-3 years
- ❑ 10 or more years
- ❑ 4-6 years

7. How many years have you been working as an organizer at your current organization?

- ❑ Less than 1 year
- ❑ 7-9 years
- ❑ 1-3 years
- ❑ 10 or more years
- ❑ 4-6 years
- ❑ Not applicable, I am no longer working as an organizer

8. How big is your current organization?

- ❑ Fewer than 3 paid staff
- ❑ 10-20 paid staff
- ❑ 3-10 paid staff
- ❑ 20+ paid staff

9. How do you view your organizing job?

- ❑ As a career
- ❑ A job (current work, but not necessarily long-term)
- ❑ A stepping stone to a career in a related field
- ❑ Other, please describe _____

2. JOB QUALITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

10. What is most important to your overall job satisfaction?

	Not at all important	Not so important	Somewhat important	Very Important	Extremely important (deal breaker)
Fair wages	O	O	O	O	O
Benefits and paid leave	O	O	O	O	O
Professional development, mentoring and training	O	O	O	O	O
Fair policies & practices	O	O	O	O	O
Role in organizational decision-making	O	O	O	O	O
Flexible working options	O	O	O	O	O
Advancement opportunities	O	O	O	O	O
Organizational transparency	O	O	O	O	O
Meaningful work and recognition of individual contribution	O	O	O	O	O
Good leadership	O	O	O	O	O
Voice and independence	O	O	O	O	O
Sustainable job responsibilities	O	O	O	O	O
Established protocols to address discrimination and harassment	O	O	O		O

11. How would you rate your overall job satisfaction?

- ❑ Completely satisfied
- ❑ Mostly satisfied
- ❑ Mostly dissatisfied
- ❑ Completely dissatisfied

12. Do you think, or have you thought, about leaving paid organizing?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

13. How are organizing campaigns impacted by your working conditions?

- ❑ Campaigns are less successful because of poor working conditions for organizers
- ❑ Campaigns are more successful because of good working conditions for organizers
- ❑ Other, please specify _____
- ❑ Campaign success does not depend on working conditions for organizers
- ❑ Not sure

Please explain your response and/or share an example:

14. Do you feel that working conditions for organizers need to be improved?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

3. WORKING CONDITIONS

WAGE & HOUR

15. How many total paid hours a week do you work as an organizer on average?
Include only your total paid hours.

- ❑ 20 hours or less per week
- ❑ 20-30 hours per week
- ❑ 30-40 hours per week
- ❑ 40-50 hours per week
- ❑ Over 50 hours per week

16. How many unpaid hours a week do you work as an organizer on average? *Include only your estimate of unpaid hours.*

- ❑ None, I do not work unpaid hours
- ❑ 1-5 unpaid hours per week
- ❑ 5-10 unpaid hours per week
- ❑ 10-15 unpaid hours per week
- ❑ 15-20 unpaid hours a week
- ❑ Over 20 unpaid hours per week

17. What is your paid employment status?

- ❑ Full-time, hourly
- ❑ Full-time, salaried
- ❑ Part-time, hourly
- ❑ Part-time, salaried
- ❑ Contractor/Freelance
- ❑ Temporary/Seasonal
- ❑ Other, please specify: _____

18. What are your current wages

- 18a. What is your current (or was your most recent) hourly wage?

  $ _____ per hour, for _____ paid hours per week

  -OR-

- 18b. What is your current (or was your most recent) annual individual income as an organizer?

  $ _____ annually, for _____ for an average hours per week

19. What kinds of raises are available to you? Check all that apply.

- ❑ Annual cost of living adjustment (COLA)
- ❑ Step/promotion-based for increasing job duties
- ❑ Bonuses
- ❑ Seniority raises
- ❑ Merit/performance (individual)
- ❑ Merit/performance (team)
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ Other, please specify: _____

BENEFITS

<u>To the best of your knowledge</u>

20. What type of paid time off does your employer offer to you? Check all that apply:

- ❑ Vacation days _____ days per year (if known)
- ❑ Paid holidays _____ days per year (if known)
- ❑ Paid sick time _____ days per year (if known)

- ❑ Paid personal days _____ days per year (if known)
- ❑ Bereavement time _____ days per year (if known)
- ❑ Combined paid time off in days _____ days per year (if known)

21. What type of insurance benefits does your employer offer to you? Check all that apply:

- ❑ Health Insurance
- ❑ Dental insurance
- ❑ Vision insurance
- ❑ Health Savings Plan or Flexible Spending Plan
- ❑ Alternative Care (e.g. chiropractic, acupuncture, etc)
- ❑ Unemployment insurance
- ❑ Worker's Compensations insurance
- ❑ Life insurance
- ❑ Disability insurance
- ❑ None. My employer does not offer any insurance benefits

22. If you know, does the health insurance plan offered by your employer cover you and dependents, spouse, or domestic partner? Please describe how health package costs are shared with your employer:

	Organization pays full cost	Employee (you) pay full cost	Split costs: Employer pays a portion, Employee pays portion
Health insurance for employee only	O	O	O
Health insurance for dependents and family	O	O	O
Health insurance for spouse	O	O	O
Health insurance for domestic partner	O	O	O

23. If your employer offers a retirement or pension savings plan, does the organization make a contribution?

- ❑ No retirement/pension plan
- ❑ Voluntary contributions only
- ❑ Employer contribution (e.g. matches 1-5% of employee compensation)
- ❑ Other (please describe any other conditions of retirement and pension)

_____

24. What other types of benefits does your employer provide? Check all that apply.

- ❑ Paid Family leave
- ❑ Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- ❑ Sabbatical leave
- ❑ Professional development / educational development (resources/time)
- ❑ Training/Mentorship/ Apprenticeship
- ❑ Transportation (free or discounted parking, transit)
- ❑ Mobile Phone
- ❑ Volunteer time (organizations pays organizers to volunteer elsewhere)
- ❑ Flexible hours
- ❑ Comp time (i.e. take a Monday off if you work Sunday)
- ❑ Telecommuting (prior to COVID-19)
- ❑ Severance pay for long-term employees
- ❑ Physical/Neurodiversity accommodations
- ❑ None of the above
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ Other, please specify: _____

25. What, if any, barriers do you experience accessing these benefits? Check all that apply.

- ❑ Cost are too high
- ❑ Not able to take time off from work (e.g. work demands do not allow)
- ❑ Administrative barriers too high (e.g. paperwork, process, etc.)
- ❑ Don't know how to access (e.g. access too difficult to navigate)
- ❑ Concern for safety or security (e.g. because of immigration status or other reasons)
- ❑ Benefits do not cover my needs or my needs are not considered
- ❑ Other barrier, please specify: _____

_____

- ❑ Not sure if benefits are medically necessary.
- ❑ Stigma associated with accessing benefits too high (e.g. health/mental health)
- ❑ Discouraged from accessing benefits (organizational culture)
- ❑ None of the above, I am very comfortable accessing benefits
- ❑ Not sure, I have never tried to access benefits
- ❑ N/A, I have no employment benefits

26. Do you feel the current wage and benefit policies reflect the organization's stated values?

Policies:	Not at all	Not so much	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely
Labor standards	O	O	O	O	O
Wages	O	O	O	O	O
Fair and equitable pay and practices	O	O	O	O	O
Benefits	O	O	O	O	O
Family friendly	O	O	O	O	O
Job security and longevity	O	O	O	O	O
Rewards high performance	O	O	O	O	O

WAGE TRANSPARENCY

27. Does your employer tell employees what and when they will get paid?

❑ Yes ❑ Not sure

❑ No

28. Does your organization use a standard payscale for positions across the organization?

❑ Yes ❑ Not sure

❑ No

- 28a. If so, is the payscale for positions openly available to staff within your organization?

❑ Yes ❑ Not sure

❑ No

29. Does your organization openly share rationale for pay decisions? (e.g. values, sector data, organizational budget, etc.)

❑ Yes ❑ Not sure

❑ No

30. Do you believe that your organization's wages and payscale are comparable to other organizing groups of the same size?

❑ Yes ❑ Not sure

❑ No

Worker Organizing/Unionization **Only for non-union organizers*

31. Have you or other staff at your organization ever considered forming a staff union?

- ❑ Yes, and we were successful!
- ❑ Yes, and we are currently in the process of forming a union/ exploring the idea.
- ❑ Yes, but we were not able to form a union.
- ❑ No, we've never considered it.
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ What's a union?

Please describe your experience (Optional)

Policies & Practices

32. Does your organization have policies and protocols in place for any of the following (check all that apply):

- ❑ Grievances policies and filing process
- ❑ Sexual misconduct (policies, training, process)
- ❑ Discrimination policies, training, and filing process
- ❑ Not sure

33. What, if any, barriers exist to accessing these organizational policies and practices? Check all that apply.

- ❑ Administrative barriers too high (e.g. paperwork, process, etc.)
- ❑ Don't know how to access (e.g. access too difficult to navigate)
- ❑ Concern for safety or security (e.g. because of
- ❑ Other barrier, please specify: _____
- ❑ Discouraged from accessing (organizational culture)
- ❑ None of the above, I am very comfortable accessing
- ❑ Not sure, I have never tried to access

_____

Organizational Culture

34. Please select which of these POOR WORKING CONDITIONS, if any, are an ongoing part of your organization's culture. (*Check all that apply*)

- ❑ Low wages
- ❑ Unpaid labor
- ❑ Temporary/contract labor
- ❑ Unpaid internships
- ❑ Unpaid travel
- ❑ Self-sacrifice
- ❑ Discrimination or inequity based on identity (race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, disability, religion, etc.)
- ❑ Short-term wins/success favored over long-term success
- ❑ Obligated to work weekends/ weeknights without prior notice/agreement or ability to "even out" hours
- ❑ Discourage/Hinder time off
- ❑ Discourage/Hinder accessing benefits
- ❑ Demand overtime
- ❑ Tolerates burnout
- ❑ Other, please specify _____

35. Have you ever experienced burnout as an organizer?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No
- ❑ Not sure

- 35a. If Yes, what factors contribute(d) to burnout? What impact has that had on your life?

_____

_____

- 35b. If No, what factors help prevent burnout?

_____

_____

36. Please select which of these GOOD/QUALITY WORKING CONDITIONS, if any, are an ongoing part of your organization's culture. (Check all that apply)

- ❑ Ability to air questions or concerns without fear of retaliation
- ❑ Decision-making authority or independent freedom to take action
- ❑ Ability to influence organizational practices
- ❑ Ability to influence strategic direction as a whole
- ❑ Organization's willingness to share information with you

- ❑ Value transparency (wage, decision-making, etc.)
- ❑ Shares power with workers/ employees
- ❑ Actively addresses dynamics of power, privilege and identity in
- ❑ Other, please specify _____

support of workers (e.g. racial justice, gender justice, etc.)

- ❑ Is supportive of my overall wellbeing (e.g. including emotional, mental, physical health, etc.)

4. SOLUTIONS

37. If you had a magic wand, what are the most important changes you would make to improve working conditions for organizers?

Please describe:

ALL DUE RESPECT

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