

Path to Power 2018-2033

**A Plan for Community Change
and Community Change Action**

COMMUNITY
Power from the
ground up **CHANGE**

Foreword

Charting this path with you

The story of this country is of an unsteady march toward an idea of freedom. We make great leaps toward liberty and justice, and then fall back. Two steps forward, one step back.

When Community Change began our strategic planning process in March 2016, it was not obvious where we were in that cycle, but following the 2016 elections it became clearer that we were heading backwards. We have fought to change that trajectory—to create the conditions for transformational change that moves us in the direction of justice, equity, and an inclusive democracy and economy.

Path to Power is our statement of purpose and Community Change's role in this moment. Two years into its implementation, our assumptions and strategic framework largely hold: that Black, Brown, and immigrant communities must build greater power; that community organizing must evolve if we want civil society to act as a countervailing power to the state and to concentrated wealth; that a bold governing agenda must present more than incremental policy prescriptions; and that changing the electorate is essential to political clout and requires an alternative approach to traditional party politics.

Our plan, shared here in summary, reflects our best thinking and synthesizes conversations with over 600 people. We spoke with grassroots leaders in low-income communities of color; partners and allies running key social justice groups at the local, state and national level; leaders from the private sector, including Silicon Valley tech entrepreneurs; and futurists and academics looking at big trends over the next few decades and fresh approaches to social change.

Each one of us has a part to play. To paraphrase Senator Robert F. Kennedy, in whose legacy we were founded, our individual actions send forth a ripple of hope that, together, form a powerful current that can sweep down the mightiest wall of oppression. As the new co-leaders of Community Change and Community Change Action, we stepped into this process at different times. When it began, Dorian Warren was the chair of the Community Change board. He joined the staff as president of Community Change Action in November 2016, and two years later, he became the president of Community Change, a role Deepak Bhargava held for 16 years. Lorella Praeli joined the organization in September 2019 as president of Community Change Action, bringing an important new perspective from her work with the ACLU, Hillary for America, United We Dream, and a life of immigration advocacy.

Our partnership—built on complementary strengths and experiences—is rooted in our deep commitment to Community Change's mission and to the people and partners who are the heart of our strategy and essential to our success. Fifty years after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we are leaning into the struggle to build the beloved community he imagined.

Join us. This is not a vision for one organization, alone. It is an invitation to join us in the forever unfinished project of democracy.

Onward,

Dorian Warren, President, Community Change
Lorella Praeli, President, Community Change Action

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Cover Image: Voces de la Frontera



Who We Are

Mission

To build the power and capacity of low-income people, especially low-income people of color, to change the policies and institutions that impact their lives.

Vision

All people and communities thrive as low-income people of color, immigrants, and women wield power to reshape our democracy and our economy to be just, equitable, and inclusive.

Values

Courage, compassion, and creativity are the hallmarks of how we aspire to live inside the organization and how we show up in the broader movement

People

Our work centers the leadership of people directly affected by injustice:

People struggling to make ends meet and especially people of color.

Women and especially women of color.

Immigrants and especially immigrants of color.

Our Plan

The Center for Community Change was born into the chaos and heartbreak that followed the deaths of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in 1968. Our founders came from the civil rights and labor movements, from Sen. Kennedy's campaign and from the war on poverty. **Their vision and their charge—to build power through grassroots leadership, to challenge the government to be a force for good, to focus on poor people, especially poor people of color—are just as relevant today as at the time of our birth.**

During the past five decades, our organization, now known as Community Change, and its affiliated advocacy arm, Community Change Action, strengthened the field of community organizing. We incubated hundreds of grassroots community groups and nurtured thousands of grassroots leaders. We also disrupted it, bringing to bear other dimensions of power such as electoral politics, strategic communications, and an approach that combines inside influence and outside agitation.

We won significant anti-poverty victories, including major new investments in affordable housing; expansions of refundable child tax credits and the food stamps program; policy changes that drove billions of dollars of private investment to communities of color; and new approaches to delivering good jobs at scale to community residents. And, as part of a broad coalition, we won and defended the largest expansion of public benefits in 50 years through health care reform. We have led the modern immigrant rights movement, convening the largest coalition of immigrant-led, grassroots groups in the country through the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM). We have pioneered new methods to bring grassroots leaders into civic life by nurturing emerging social movements, and we continue to hone new approaches to increase civic engagement through large-scale electoral and national issue campaigns.

Since 2017, our communities' hard-fought gains have been under attack. We have resisted the worst abuses of the Trump Administration and persisted in calling for more than a meek preservation of the status quo. We campaigned to defend immigrant communities and protect the social safety net, won positive changes on jobs, child care, and housing at the state and local level—even in this dismal climate—and we ran one of the largest progressive independent expenditure programs in 2018 to motivate and turn out infrequent voters, particularly voters of color.

As we marked our 50th Anniversary in 2018, we recalled the backlash politics and reactionary violence that engulfed the year of our founding, 1968. We recognized the stumble backward in our unsteady march, and we acknowledged the fruition of a decades-long strategy by the right to undermine our democracy and rig the economy in favor of a wealthy, white ruling class.

Path to Power is our response. It is about building power from the ground up because justice for working people, immigrants, and people of color—especially Black people—will only be possible if we radically rebalance power in this country. That is our charge. That is the path Community Change and Community Change Action have begun to walk.

Our goal is to dramatically improve material conditions for people struggling to make ends meet in the United States. On the path ahead to 2033, our role is to fuse the power of organized people, bold ideas, and political clout—a three-dimensional power that we believe is the recipe for transformational change. We aim to define a new logic and a new narrative of our economy and democracy where everyone has the freedom to thrive.

Achieving this ambitious goal will require a stronger institution. Community Change must evolve, focusing our work on the four-pronged strategy outlined in this plan and developing new methods, practices, and capacities. The goal and strategies we defined for ourselves will require stronger partnerships with grassroots groups and alliances; deeper engagement with the private sector; many more leaders, particularly women leaders of color; and a new focus on redefining the common sense on which our democracy and economy are based. We are also strengthening a number of fundamental organizational capacities; we must be able to leverage the power of our public brand and the untapped resource of data and technology. We must also interrogate and improve our models of risk management and financing.

The next year will be pivotal for the country. With political turbulence and economic uncertainty, the odds are daunting. We have seen the way people in power have used crisis to consolidate power. We believe this moment can be different. This year, we have an opportunity to put this country on a different path and to build the power to keep it from sliding back.

Our Analysis

Threats and Opportunities for Social Justice

Community Change and Community Change Action based our plan for 2018-2033 on consistent themes that emerged throughout our inquiry: disruption, retrenchment, and seeds of possibility.

The world will be radically different in 2033. Enormous, interconnected challenges have fundamentally disrupted our politics, economy, and culture. We are already feeling the impact of climate change, concentrated in already marginalized and disinvested communities. It is contributing to mass migration around the world. Countervailing powers are challenging U.S. dominance on the international stage, and ethnic and racialized nationalism are on the rise in this country and throughout the world. Automation's threat to the future of work is growing, and it builds on the decades-long assault on organized labor and increasing disparities in wealth and income. At the same time, accelerating changes in technology and media are challenging our notions of knowing, being, and community. This period of turbulence calls into question the assumptions that undergird our social economy. We can either point the country toward greater inclusion and the realization of our founding ideals or we can allow the hierarchies of class, race, and gender to continue to define our imperfect democracy and exploitative economy.

The social justice sector in the United States is weak, vulnerable, and disorganized. Despite the mobilization of a newly politicized resistance to the Trump Administration, progressive civil society lacks the organization, durable power at scale, and strategic alignment to act as a counterweight to well-organized and powerful conservative and corporate forces.

- Every pillar of the social justice coalition is facing its own crisis: relentless attacks on organized labor; declining membership in mainline churches; and new times challenging legacy civil rights organizations to retool.
- For all of the positive changes in the field over the last 20 years, community groups reach too few people and the most robust groups are like islands of strength in a vast, unorganized ocean. Black organizations on the ground have been disinvested and dramatically weakened. Although the exponential growth of the immigrant rights movement over the last 15 years is a bright spot, a series of long campaigns and relentless, brutal attacks are testing the movement's resiliency as never before. At the grassroots level, while new forms of digital activism and mobilization are flourishing, organizational infrastructure has stagnated, making insufficient use of new technology to recruit volunteer member-leaders, and relying on a professionalized model that cannot deliver either the scale of mobilization or the long-term sustainability necessary for transformational change.
- Despite the proliferation of think tanks and policy shops, we lack an alternative vision for the country we seek to create. We cannot answer the big questions that confront us, and we are paying the price for the lack of compelling alternatives. What is our affirmative 21st century immigration vision that explains who should come to the United States, under what circumstances and conditions, and in what numbers? What is the unifying economic agenda and narrative that threads discrete policies into a coherent whole and inspires a broad-based coalition? Fifty years after the Kerner Commission report, what are the transformative solutions to end racialized poverty rather than deal with its pernicious downstream effects?



Bright spots point the way forward.

We must focus on what is working and nurture these seeds of possibility:

- Periods of turmoil and change—and existential threats like the climate crisis and the effects of automation—create opportunities to reimagine the rules of the economy and advance new solutions that foreground equity in areas such as income support, care work, job creation, and a new clean energy economy. At the local level, a wave of innovation is introducing new opportunities, reflected in the progress of our own work with partners achieving breakthroughs at the city and state level on jobs, child care, and housing in recent years. New technologies and a spirit of experimentation in parts of the field and in other sectors may offer solutions to reaching organizational scale, solving long-standing financing challenges, and creating a new narrative and common sense for our democracy and economy.
- After 40 years, the “common sense” of neoliberalism is finally being called into question. Across sectors—including academia, philanthropy, think tanks, and government—the experts have started to catch up with ordinary people who experience the daily injustices of a political economy that leaves them struggling to make ends meet. We have the ingredients to co-create an alternative narrative to neoliberalism, one in which ordinary people can see themselves and exercise democratic ownership.
- Demographics are not destiny, but they create the possibility of a progressive multiracial coalition, and extraordinary leaders—especially young leaders, most of whom are women of color—are emerging from social movements such as the immigrant rights movement and the upsurge of activism in Black communities.
- In resistance to the Trump Administration, new groups have helped to bring new, predominantly white, middle class people into advocacy and political action. In campaigns like our work to defend Medicaid, we saw the effectiveness of a multiracial coalition, led by directly affected people, that harnesses this renewed activism and leverages it for our common purpose.
- An alternative approach to electoral politics is emerging through the innovation and iteration of many players at the local, state, and national levels. Community Change Action has helped lead the way on this over the past 15 years. This new paradigm increasingly provides a roadmap to changing the electorate, turning infrequent voters of color into frequent voters, and altering the political math of the country.

IMPACT

Between 2018 and 2033, we will improve dramatically the material conditions for people struggling to make ends meet in the United States, particularly poor people of color, as measured by changes in poverty rates and racial and gender disparities.

GOAL

By 2025, we will enact bold, structural changes at the federal level that advance economic justice, racial justice, and immigrant rights.

STRATEGY

BUILD BLACK, BROWN, AND IMMIGRANT POWER

Expand the number of Black, Brown, and immigrant organizations with the capacity and scale to wield real power in their communities.
Forge deep alliances between Black, Brown, and immigrant organizations.

CREATE AN ELECTORAL POWERHOUSE

Shrink or eliminate the race and class gap in voting rates.
Increase electoral power of and accountability to Black, Brown, and immigrant communities.

REINVENT COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Develop models of sustainable, volunteer-led community organizations with scale and soul.
Integrate new technology and communications tools in community organizing practice.

ADVANCE A GOVERNING AGENDA

Develop a transformational set of ideas to bring about economic justice, racial justice, and immigrant rights.
Build power in communities to test the assumptions of this plan, implement policies based on these ideas, and inject them in each election cycle.

NEW METHODS AND PRACTICES

RESHAPING PARTNERSHIPS

GENERATING VISIONARY IDEAS

ELEVATING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

CAPACITIES TO STRENGTHEN

SPEAKING WITH A BOLD PUBLIC VOICE

ENHANCING TECHNOLOGY AND DATA

EMBEDDING RACE AND GENDER JUSTICE

FORTIFYING RISK MANAGEMENT

INCREASING FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Community Change Strategy

We envision a just, equitable, and inclusive economy and democracy where all people and communities thrive. As part of a wider ecosystem of groups and leaders working for social justice, Community Change and Community Change Action aim to define and win a governing agenda by 2025 that would set us on a path to confront structural, generational, racialized poverty. Our agenda must be more than a policy platform; we aim to rewrite the rules of our economy based on ideas that emerge through dialogue across different forms of expertise, rooted in lived experience.

That charge begins within our own institutions. As we seek to change our democracy and economy, Community Change is also looking internally, seeking to align our programs and operations with our values of race and gender justice. By centering and investing in the leadership of directly affected people—particularly women of color—we are able to not only live our values but also to access the distinctive expertise that comes from the experience of multiple layers of oppression.

Our vision for the country requires transformation, which will only be possible if we dramatically rebalance power in the United States.

Our strategy is rooted in lessons learned from past periods of significant progressive change. In just a few years in the mid-1960s, we won the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, Immigration and Naturalization Act, the Economic Opportunity Act, Medicare and Medicaid, Social Security reform, Food Stamps, and Welfare. We won these things based on a confluence of political opportunity, bold ideas, strategic leadership, and—what our culture tends to overlook—power from the ground up.

We are uniquely positioned to take on this role of fueling a movement led by directly affected people. We developed a strategy with four core pillars, each deeply related to and requiring the others.

1. **Build Black, Brown, and Immigrant Power:** We will strengthen Black, Brown, and immigrant organizing infrastructure on the ground so that these communities have substantial power in key geographies, are networked nationally, have a shared vision, have strong relationships with each other, and can play a leadership role in a broader multiracial movement for economic and social justice.
2. **Create an Electoral Powerhouse:** We cannot conceive a path to our goal without an electorate that looks more like the country, so we will build a large-scale political operation housed within the appropriate legal entities that increases voter participation and builds permanent political organization in communities of color.
3. **Reinvent Community Organizing:** We will innovate modes of community organization that engage communities at scale; have sustainable funding mechanisms; and continue to build a sense of shared fate through deep relationships. We simply cannot achieve our goals for the next 15 years without vibrant organizing at scale in low-income communities and communities of color – and we see a new path forward emerging.
4. **Advance a Governing Agenda:** We will generate big ideas to advance economic well-being, racial justice, and immigrant rights and translate these ideas into policy proposals. We will use issue campaigns to build power, test policy at the local and state level, and build the broad-based coalitions required to win.

Our vision for the country requires transformation, which will only be possible if we dramatically rebalance power in the United States.



credit: LaDon Love



credit: Mary Ann Dolcemascolo

1. Build Black, Brown, & Immigrant Power

PREMISE

To rebalance power in this country, the movement for social justice requires multiracial coalitions that build common purpose and solidarity across race, gender, and immigration status. The leadership of directly affected people—both within their communities and in alliances that cross constituencies—is essential if we hope to realize the disruptive and transformational potential of a multiracial movement. Yet, these alliances have faced challenges in the past because of racialized attacks from without and the legacy of racialized disinvestment in organizing infrastructure from within.

We must counter that paradox by dramatically strengthening organizing infrastructure and building long-term power in Black communities, Brown communities, and immigrant communities. They are the canaries in the coal mine of U.S. democracy, and they hold a particular position in this era of intense white backlash, concentration of economic power, and threats to our democracy. We believe that without strong anchor organizations in these specific communities, the multiracial project we envision cannot succeed. Of course, neither people nor communities fit neatly within any one demographic box. We recognize people's lives and communities cut across these lines in many beautiful ways and include lived experience at the intersections—Black immigrants, people of color who are not immigrants, people in mixed status families, multigenerational immigrant households, and many others.

In partnership with organizations grounded in the multi-issue, lived experience of communities of color, Community Change and Community Change Action aim to build real power in key geographies, network groups nationally, co-create a shared vision, nurture strong relationships among groups, and position them to lead a multiracial movement for social and economic justice.

Our plan builds on Community Change and Community Change Action's distinctive assets. We have been a national home for the immigrant rights movement for nearly 20 years. The field is now facing unprecedented threats, and with our partners in FIRM, we have begun to chart a path to a long-term response.

We also convene the Black Freedom Collective, a cohort of Black-led groups and Black organizers who come together with the shared goal of building power from the ground up. In contrast to the surge of digital, electoral, and mobilization approaches, Black-led “on the ground” organizing infrastructure continues to lack resources and capacity to win, sustain, and protect gains for Black communities.

“ *These are terrible times for new Americans, and Community Change has a major role to play supporting the leaders and movement that will turn this around. Community Change played a vital role in building the modern immigrant rights movement in the United States and making it stronger—helping to develop new leaders, nurture up and coming organizations, create a fabric of trust among state based organizations through the Fair Immigration Reform Movement, and pioneering new strategies such as digital and electoral techniques. CHIRLA has grown exponentially over the past decade, and this partnership played a major role in our development.* **”**

—Angelica Salas, President of CHIRLA

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Black, Brown, and immigrant communities are on the front lines of racialized attacks, and their experience positions them to lead a broad-based coalition for social and economic justice. With our partners in FIRM, the Black Freedom Collective, and our issue campaigns, we are returning to fundamentals:

- Building long-term organizing infrastructure on the ground, including in key geographies.
- Reinvesting in leadership development and capacity building.
- Co-creating a long-term vision for immigrant rights and racial justice in the context of a larger social justice agenda.
- Coordinating state and local campaigns that defend our communities while pointing toward our affirmative vision.
- Positioning Black, Brown, and immigrant leaders to shape strategies and direction in multiracial coalitions at the state and national level.
- Doubling down on civic engagement strategies that leverage changing demographics.

Community Change and Community Change Action will advance that goal by building organizational capacity and investing in the leadership of both staff and grassroots leaders; strengthening electoral capacity; and engaging leaders in co-creating bold, imaginative strategies. We will:

- Increase the number of Black and immigrant organizations with the capacity and scale to win state and local change, lead multiracial coalitions at the state and local level, and invest particularly in the leadership of women of color.
- Position Black and immigrant leaders and their constituencies in FIRM and our Black Freedom partners as a dynamic center of a national multiracial movement for economic justice, racial equity, and immigrant rights.
- Forge deep alliances, common cause, and aligned strategies between Black and immigrant organizations, confronting the role of racism and anti-Blackness as impediments to the solidarity we seek to engender.

“ *Now more than ever, we need the kinds of national collaborations and strategies that we have with Community Change. They understand, like we understand, that building local and state power is central to winning our national agenda. Community Change has supported our breakthrough local work on job creation for low-income people in LA through policy, research, communications and opportunities to learn with peers around the country, and they’ve created platforms for me as a leader – and for SCOPE – to have a voice and make connections on the national stage.*

—Gloria Walton, President & CEO, SCOPE (Strategic Concepts in Organizing & Policy Education)

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2. Create an Electoral Powerhouse in Communities of Color

PREMISE

Governing power of, by, and for low-income people of color requires an electorate that looks more like the country. It requires a multiracial coalition where people who have been systematically excluded from democratic practice see themselves and their interests represented in the electoral arena. Although it is not a panacea, we cannot succeed without voter participation as one dimension of power.

Changing the electoral reality requires better mechanisms of civic engagement that disrupt the typical last-minute, under-funded efforts to turn out voters in communities of concentrated poverty and communities of color. Electoral operations designed by and for voters of color also build durable organizing power in our communities.

Community Change Action has built our model of civic engagement on three principles: working with trusted local partners and leaders; using values-driven messaging; and building long-term organizational capacity. In 2016, we ran the largest national independent turnout program targeting low-propensity Latino and immigrant voters. We dramatically increased turnout in our targeted areas, beating the pre-election model numbers in each of our program states. In 2018, we engaged 2.5 million voters as part of a collaboration with Color of Change PAC, Planned Parenthood Votes, and SEIU in three states, as well as hundreds of thousands more voters through our partners in FIRM Action.

Our model of integrated voter engagement is in vogue; it is not new for us. Community Change Action and our local partners have been honing our approach over the past 15 years. In Ohio, for example, we provided training, resources, and on-the-ground coaching in 2007 to support our partner's first electoral program, which focused on registering and turning out low-propensity Black voters in Cincinnati. In 2016, they registered 184,000 voters and knocked on more than 475,000 doors — capacity catalyzed by the investment we made 10 years earlier and the thinking we did together about how we build state-based power.

“Community Change has been a vital partner to the Ohio Organizing Collaborative’s success, helping build new capacities and thinking together about how we are building state-based power in Ohio. Whether it’s supporting our first local electoral programs in 2007, helping to catalyze our statewide criminal justice strategy, or winning campaigns together on child care—Community Change has been a trusted, practical, strategic partner to the Ohio Organizing Collaborative. And in the next generation of our partnership, we will continue to build the people power necessary to heal and restore our communities.”

—Damareo Cooper, Former Executive Director, Ohio Organizing Collaborative

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Community Change Action is collaborating deeply with state and local organizations to create a large-scale, permanent political operation. We are continuing to evolve, integrating new technologies and best practices to create the most effective approach possible.

Marrying the best aspects of community organizing and traditional political campaigns, we will use elections to both engage voters at scale and to build lasting organization, power, and leadership at the local level. Our vision is to develop a network of community members who will invite friends and family to take action through voting, being counted in the census, and engaging in ongoing organizing and issue campaigns.

Community Change Action will:

- Shrink or eliminate the race and class gap in voting rates.
- Increase the electoral power of Black and immigrant communities in key states, rooted in grassroots partner groups with the capacity to run hard money, data-driven, results-oriented programs that reach enough voters to swing statewide elections.
- Build permanent, grassroots capacity for political operations led by local volunteer leaders and financed by the community with a model that emerges through a process of co-creation and iteration with local partners.

“Community Change Action and Planned Parenthood Votes share a commitment to turning out people of color and women in a way that changes the electorate and builds lasting voice, organization and leadership on the ground.”

—Cecile Richards, Former President of Planned Parenthood and Founder of Supermajority

3. Reinvent Community Organizing

PREMISE

Our theory of change is rooted in the belief that low-income people, especially people of color, must be the agents of change in their own lives. Community organizing is the practice of building a community of ordinary people who—through organizing—can counter organized money. But if we continue to rely on traditional forms and structures of organizing, we will never build the scale of power we need. The field is currently too dependent on a narrow range of external funding sources, too reliant on paid staff in a way that limits scalability, and too insulated from the potential of technology to recruit a mass base and reach a mass audience.

Our field requires radical innovation. To solve the broad and structural problems we face, community organizing must evolve in a way that reaches significantly more people and operates with much greater sustainability. But because the power of organizing is directly related to the depth of relationships and community it creates, we cannot sacrifice its soulful and distinctive commitment to the development of grassroots community leaders.

Our sector has the imagination and appetite for reinvention, and many groups are responding, particularly in three areas:

- **Leadership:** Some community organizations and groups in other sectors are reinventing their staff and leadership models, including promising experiments with volunteer-driven organizing models.
- **Fundraising:** The field needs new funding models, and some groups are demonstrating significant potential with innovative projects to test new methods of fundraising, find new sources of revenue, and create financing approaches.
- **Technology:** Start-up groups, including those Community Change incubated, are experimenting with new approaches to build scale, enable grassroots leaders to mobilize their social networks, and create compelling content that shapes narrative.

Because of our ecumenical approach to organizing, Community Change can engage grassroots groups across lines of methodology and affiliation. We are uniquely able to gather emerging ideas, test them through experimentation, and share what we learn across the sector.

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Community Change is well-positioned to lead this inquiry in partnership with organizations that are already experimenting with new approaches to build power in communities. We bring deep ties to innovators in the field and in other sectors and a track record of experimentation and incubation over the last decade. With our partners, we will:

- Identify original practices, strategies, and models that can break through the current barriers to scale and influence. We will integrate the most promising within issue and electoral campaigns and learn from their results in practice.
- Develop models of sustainable community organizations that rely on volunteer leaders to engage millions of new people and adopt new approaches to financing.
- Integrate new technology, social media, and data into community organizing practice.

We will explore various approaches to achieve these goals, work with partner organizations to adopt and test innovative organizing models, and evaluate their effectiveness and replicability. We have already begun to test and scale two approaches in communities across the country: “online-to-offline” and “relational” organizing programs. The online-to-offline organizing model begins with low-cost online engagement, and then moves offline using time-tested methods to engage highly motivated people: in-person meetings and trainings for a top tier of leaders who show the capacity to engage other community members and initiate action. In our test of “relational organizing” methodology, organizers equip leaders to engage their trusted networks — families, friends, and neighbors — over multiple communication channels, to spur them to action. “Relational organizing” technology of today builds on traditional community organizing principles and uses mobile phone apps to systematize and scale the base of people involved.

“The combination of discipline, courage and imagination needed to win big are rare – and Community Change’s plans to change to meet this moment in history give me hope. They have been leaders in innovating in community organizing – and helping us build bridges in the progressive movement across silos and sectors to build power. SEIU relies on Community Change as a key partner to build power for working people and end poverty wages in America.”
—Mary Kay Henry, President, Service Employees International Union

4. Advance a Governing Agenda

PREMISE

History teaches us that opportunities for bold, structural change are fleeting moments —the New Deal and the Great Society each changed paradigms in a few brief years. They are also built on years of behind-the-scenes work to generate, test, and build momentum for bold ideas and political resonance for structural change.

We aim to bring about the political opportunity for a similar scale of change and to put forward an alternative vision for a new political, social, and economic reality. Our governing agenda is based on values that are grounded in a different common sense; point to a new narrative; and inform a comprehensive, holistic set of policy proposals:

- A freedom to thrive that includes a basic level of income, quality child care, universal health care, and a place to call home.
- Radical inclusion that informs new rules for our political economy and opens opportunities that have been denied because of race, gender, and nation of origin.
- Equity-driven policy that focuses the government’s power on fostering dramatically more fairness in the distribution of wealth and on checking corporate power.
- Innovative government that challenges the market’s monopoly on big ideas and delivers necessary services and public goods.
- True democracy that no longer favors the wealthy, in which communities hold their representatives accountable and civil society flourishes.

Community Change has a unique and strategic role to play in this space, beginning with an iterative process of idea generation that is deeply grounded in communities and that curates dialogue across lines of difference. Too often, grassroots leaders, academics, public officials, and private sector actors work in isolation. By convening people with different forms of expertise and engaging them in carefully curated questions, Community Change believes that we can start to define a new set of rules for our democracy and economy. That work is the foundation for a policy platform rooted in lived experience.

“I’ve had a unique view into Community Change from multiple vantage points – as a leader of a grassroots partner organization, as part of Community Change through a Distinguished Taconic Fellowship, and now as a member of Congress. Their ability to connect the dots between inside and outside strategies for social change, to create a bridge for grassroots leaders to have real impact in the corridors of power, and to work on the crises of today while fostering the space to imagine bold solutions for the future are more needed now than ever before.”

—Rep. Pramila Jayapal, Member of Congress (D-WA)

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Community Change, Community Change Action, and our grassroots partner groups will continue to fight for local, state, and national policy change through campaigns for immigration reform, housing justice, child care, income support, racial justice, and immigration work in partnership with cohorts of grassroots partners.

Our organizing campaigns will offer laboratories to test the effectiveness of our ideas and sources for imaginative thinking. Our work to shape public opinion and engage millions of people through electoral work will provide a window to what ordinary people and political elites find compelling. Throughout this process, we will build momentum so that we are ready when the opportunity arrives. We will:

- Develop breakthrough ideas on mission-critical issues using an innovative, collaborative method that bridges grassroots leaders, academics, private sector leaders, and other thinkers.
- Test these ideas in communities to assess and hone their effectiveness as policies and their resonance in the public imagination.
- Win campaigns for changes in public policy and private sector behavior that reflect and advance our long-term agenda.
- Bring ripe ideas to the national level at key moments such as the 2020 and 2024 election cycles, and build a broad coalition behind them.

“Community Change has assisted many nonprofits, including helping me when I started the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) over 35 years ago. And over the years, CBPP and Community Change have collaborated on a range of issues in national and state policy debates, blending our respective strengths in policy analysis and development and grassroots organizing to defend people with low or modest incomes and secure better policies for them. We appreciate Community Change’s dedication to those who are most in need of a voice in our society, especially in the tough times that we now face.”

—Bob Greenstein, President, The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities



New Methods and Practices

WE SEEK PARTNERS IN A SHARED PROJECT. Within the community organizing field, affiliate networks are the prevailing mode for supporting the development of local organizations and aggregating power for national impact. Community Change has been an exception in that regard, taking a more fluid, open source approach that engages disparate partners in shared projects without a fixed affiliation structure. We have decided to double down on our historic approach to partnership. We believe that open networks grounded in shared vision and deep strategic alignment offer unique advantages, particularly in a space where other institutions effectively deliver the benefits of the affiliate network role. Our role within this ecosystem is to capture the value of open networks—multiplicity, flexibility, accelerated learning, radical experimentation—which is essential to building a multiracial social movement that can meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of the present moment. The vast scale of change means that we cannot step into this plan alone. We are actively seeking partners to explore new ways of relating and collaborating—not only in transactional ways or on specific campaigns—as we work together for a more just and equitable democracy and economy.

WE NEED TO GENERATE BOLD AND VISIONARY IDEAS. To create the conditions for structural change, we must solve the vision and ideas deficit. This is less a matter of doing original policy work and more about carefully defining strategic questions, convening the right mix of people to answer them, and curating the conversations with care and deliberation. Community Change and Community Change Action will build a new practice of idea creation and develop our capacity to bridge organizing, think tanks, and academia to solve intractable problems. We are not suited to be a traditional think tank, but we have seen the potential of bringing together practitioners and academics who are eager to contribute expertise to imagine new solutions to mission-critical questions. We have abundant talent that is highly skilled at moving across worlds, framing and distilling problems, and curating conversations to find answers.

WE NEED TO ELEVATE OUR APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT. The movement simply needs more and better leaders, and those leaders need to be those who have the most at stake. This form of leadership development is the next critical step in building the necessary moral and strategic spine of our movement, and it is essential if we are to achieve the visionary, strategic goals laid out in this plan. We are beginning with a focus on the leadership of women of color in the field. We aim to create intentional space for learning and developing a program that includes Community Change and Community Change Action's distinctive methodological throughlines. These are: (a) Combining applied work with spaces for skills building and political education; (b) Working with leaders in cohorts united by a common concern, rather than only as individuals; and (c) Consciously bringing people together across lines of organizing network, tradition, issue and approach. This initiative builds off Community Change's long track record of leadership development initiatives, which have included: the Community Change Agents Program, focused on Executive Directors; Generation Change, focused on entry- and mid-level organizers; and Grassroots Ambassadors, focused on low-income volunteer leaders.

WE NEED TO ENGAGE THE PRIVATE SECTOR. Community Change has almost exclusively targeted public sector behavior as the driver of social change. Without considering the actions of private sector actors, our analysis has missed an essential set of potential targets and partners. We have begun to correct this lapse, connecting with leaders in key sectors such as technology, clean energy, and the care professions; building relationships with Silicon Valley companies and philanthropies; and exploring opportunities to engage on key problems such as immigration, income support, and jobs. We are incubating organizations that have targeted bad actors, and we are strengthening our analysis of the ways to target corporate power as another route to change.

Capacities to Strengthen

PUBLIC VOICE IS A FORM OF POWER—ONE WE MUST SEIZE. Fairly or not, as Andy Warhol said, “It’s not what you are that counts. It’s what they think you are.” Up to this point, Community Change has positioned ourselves behind the scenes to move the work and elevate our partners. Branding is a dimension of power, and we cannot achieve our goals if we continue to leave this power on the table. One of our first steps in implementing Path to Power was to begin operating as Community Change and Community Change Action, names that are clearer, more memorable, and more evocative of our purpose and approach. As we develop our new visual identity and brand strategy, we seek to position our organization in a way that builds power for our partners, amplifies the voices of our constituencies in the national debate, and makes a stronger case for the role that organizing plays in movements for social change.

OUR SECTOR MUST BETTER INTEGRATE DATA AND TECHNOLOGY. In addition to building community based on physical proximity, we are finding a sense of community online. Organizers need mechanisms to replace the scaffolding and infrastructure that legacy institutions once provided. Our ability to sustain grassroots energy and movements depends on a better understanding of the tools through which people build digital communities and more sophisticated systems to capture, analyze, and use data. Following an investment in our data systems and staff capacities, we are better integrating technology and data analysis in all areas of our work, beginning with the challenge of reinventing organizing.

RACE AND GENDER JUSTICE MUST BE EMBEDDED IN ALL OUR WORK. Social justice institutions exist within a racist, sexist, and classist society, and our organizations replicate these structures of oppression. As we seek to change external structures, policies, and institutions, Community Change is also looking internally, working to embed a race and gender justice lens in all areas of our programs and our operations.

OUR RISKS ARE INCREASING AND WE MUST PREPARE. As Community Change and Community Change Action take on elements of this strategic plan in a more public way, we must invest in mechanisms and operations to protect and position the organization to weather attacks – be they reputational, financial, legal, physical, and/or cyber. We will make additional investment in key areas, including c3/c4/PAC compliance, regranting and reporting, and cybersecurity, as well as expanding our capacity to support our partners’ capacity to assess their own systems and prepare for and respond to attacks.

WE NEED TO GROW. To accomplish the ambitious agenda laid out in this plan, Community Change and Community Change Action must increase our annual core operating expenses by 2020 by at least 25% per year. We must also be prepared to both raise and manage a substantial increase in annual campaign spending that will fluctuate based on opportunities and election cycles. We will build on the strong financial management practices in place and focus on efforts to: (a.) Diversify revenue sources; (b.) Experiment with new approaches to engage the base as funders of the movement; and (c.) Self-finance innovation through our cash operating reserve and our endowment.

Conclusion

In 1968, in the aftermath of assassinations and a grim election, as the civil rights and anti-poverty movements teetered precariously, the Center for Community Change became a home in the storm for leaders and organizers in the struggle for economic and social justice. Now, 50 years later, Community Change and Community Change Action face the turbulence of this moment with the strength of hard-won experience and an unwavering belief in the fierce dignity of low-income people of color and in their power to construct a different world.

Even as we respond to the daily crises of the Trump Administration, our gaze is fixed on this bold, ambitious vision that we firmly believe can be made real. But we cannot accomplish it alone. Community change is only possible in partnership, and we look to the next 50 years with an invitation—to join us in the long work of building power and reshaping the policies and institutions that impact our lives.

We wish to acknowledge and appreciate the hundreds of people who shared their insights and time with us, particularly the members of our staff who carved out the space to imagine the world as it could be in the midst of daily reminders of how far we have to go.



Community Change is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and Community Change Action is our affiliated 501(c)(4) advocacy arm. Throughout this document, we refer to the Community Change and Community Change Action as “we” in the context of shared vision, mission, and even shared staff. Although the two sister organizations share a common vision for the world, they operate independently and in compliance with applicable law.