It’s not you, it’s the internet:

Navigating the changing landscape of communications and organizing

This is a report by Center for Community Change
Introduction

Donald Trump is President. Fake news is now a thing we fight about every day. The following things have been declared dead: marketing, message control, political rules of the game, print, traditional media, the Democratic Party, the Republican Party. An emboldened, unapologetic segment of the electorate trumpets hate speech under the guise of “real talk” and opposition to political correctness. Yet brave champions of resistance from Black Lives Matter disrupt these narratives in what’s been called “not your grandfather’s civil rights movement.”

We live in a tumultuous moment driven by a communication technology revolution that challenges our very notions of knowing and being. And some, like SHIFT Thinking founder Mark Bonchek, say even those radical implications are hard to overstate. As he wrote in the Harvard Business Review:

“Communications revolutions like this have happened before, but you have to go back to Gutenberg in 1450 to find one as significant.”

Communication revolutions like this have happened before, but you have to go back to Gutenberg in 1450 to find one as significant. Before Gutenberg’s printing press, monks laboriously produced written manuscripts and few people could read. The printing press changed all that, ushering in an era of mass communication.

The combination of the Internet, social media, and mobile devices ushers in an era of mass collaboration. These new technologies allow anyone to connect to anyone and everyone, at any time—and there are already signs that the relationships we have with ourselves, with each other, and with our institutions are changing in response.

When Walter Cronkite famously turned against the Vietnam War—marking a critical turning point that shifted public support—his audience averaged nearly 30 million viewers a night. CBS Nightly News now has a fraction of that viewership, with only 6.2 million tuning in. Not only do fewer people get their news from the same source, news is widely disaggregated across a variety of platforms: from Facebook and Twitter to blogs and podcasts to satirical news shows like John Oliver’s “Last Week Tonight,” Trevor Noah’s “The Daily Show” and Samantha Bee’s “Full Frontal.”
Meanwhile, organizations everywhere are grappling with declining membership (the so-called Bowling Alone phenomenon) and the advent of decentralized, viral organizing through social media (see events like the 2017 Women’s March). Institutions and elites—even long-respected ones—face diminished authority in the face of mob democracy rooted in humanity’s basest instincts (Trumpism and Brexit being the most high profile examples). The facts are clear: many of the assumptions long held by organizers and strategic communicators have become obsolete.

With this paper, the Center for Community Change attempts to define a new generation of best practices. We do so with the understanding that today’s disruptive landscape resists established strategies for social change; as we look toward the future, successful navigation will require a compass, not a map. So where do we start? For progressive organizations, movements and campaigns, the object is to better understand the forces shaping communication and organizing. Only then can we create transformational opportunities that succeed because—and not in spite of—the evolving ways people interact with us and with each other. Only then can we develop the new nimbleness that social change efforts need to succeed.

This paper draws on a deep review of the literature analyzing communication trends, along with interviews with seasoned advocates, strategists and activists. First, we lay out five trends that are radically altering the communication and advocacy landscape. Then, we offer nine strategies for progressive leaders and thinkers to successfully navigate the new ways people connect to information and each other.
What do we know and how do we know it? The communications landscape, upended.

THE FIVE TRENDS

1. I’ll take my news and information customized, please.

2. Everyone’s a content creator nowadays.

3. The rise of the machines (or, singularity’s time is now).

4. It’s the end of community as we knew it (and we feel fine).

5. A new form of people power.
I’ll take my news and information customized, please.

“They’ve [Facebook] built a site that is profitable because it caters to people’s need to self-express and curate and refine their images and individual brands, and they do that within groups where they feel comfortable because everyone is like them. It’s the site for our time.”

Bill Bishop Author and Journalist

In recent years, the shift in how people get their news has been subtle, rapid and profound. On an ever-increasing basis, we now consume information from sources tailored to our choices and preexisting tastes, beliefs and views. Layered onto self-selection is the rise of data-enabled targeting: Content is fed to the user based on increasingly sophisticated data acquired about the user’s preexisting views and behaviors.

37% of Americans say they prefer personalized recommendations as a better way to get news than when it is editorially selected or based on social recommendations. Algorithms are more popular than journalists, as long as the algorithms are based on people’s personal consumption.

A rapidly developing combination of responsive design, automated display decisions and increasingly detailed individual-level data allow both publishers and platforms to deliver more tailored content and services. The news people get will increasingly depend on who they are, where they are, and what the publisher or platform they access news knows about them, people like them and people around them.

Filter bubble: This term – which describes the problem of the increasingly personalized content we consume – was coined by Eli Pariser (founder of Upworthy) in his book The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You

Facebook’s news feed algorithm was one of the first to surreptitiously enlist users in personalizing their experience—and influencing everyone else’s.

Meanwhile, as news is increasingly tailored, it’s also increasingly incorrect. The proliferation of fake news across traditional print media, broadcast news media and social media intentionally distracts people from the very real and pressing issues we need to focus on to push forward a progressive agenda and push back against attempts to roll back wins.
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Everyone’s a content creator nowadays.

“What I love about content is it has the power to change people’s lives for a second or for a day or forever. Great content creates space for people to pause and reflect, and that space is where transformation happens.”

Jolie Miller LinkedIn

In 1996, Bill Gates declared in an influential article that “content is king.” His observation about the internet was true then and is even truer now. Movements, campaigns and other purveyors of social change are literally in competition with every individual who owns a cell phone for attention and audience.

“Consumers now dominate the content creation process—with more new content posted in one month on YouTube than was created by the three major television networks in the past 60 years.”

People are interested in and seek out unique and interesting content, and good content creates a positive impression of the creator. In fact, “Seventy-eight percent of consumers feel that organizations behind the content are interested in building good relationships.”
Furthermore, traditional journalism and traditional content distribution platforms (network television, cable television, print magazines etc.) are in decline, struggling to compete with masses of free, often more authentic and entertaining, content.

Social media, in particular Facebook, are not just platforms for users to consume news and content. They’re also both curators and publishers of news—causing a blurring of journalism and social networking.

Facebook’s Instant Articles, Twitter’s Live TV broadcast deals etc. are media-hosting platforms, much like broadcast networks or newspapers.

The media often reports on social media trends, which means social media success can easily give rise to traditional media coverage.

2 billion Facebook users—⅔ of whom get their news from Facebook

The “filter bubble,” created by the algorithms employed by social media, sort through all this content to demonstrate what is important, recent, and popular—and to decide what users should see.

The proliferation of fake news spread through social media further demonstrates both the need for high quality content and social media’s power to shape public opinion. Indeed, many are crediting Donald Trump’s presidential win, in part, to the power and prevalence of fake news.
The rise of the machines (or, singularity’s time is now).

“As the Internet of things advances, the very notion of a clear dividing line between reality and virtual reality becomes blurred, sometimes in creative ways.”

Geoff Mulgan
Computer scientist and former Presidential Innovation Fellow

Increasingly, people and things are connected to the internet at all times. In 1958, renowned mathematician and Manhattan Project scientist, Stanislaw Ulam described the “ever accelerating progress of technology and changes in the mode of human life, which gives the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race beyond which human affairs, as we know them, could not continue.” We don’t buy into Ulam’s notion that the end of human history is imminent, but few can deny that the radical integration between technology and the human mind has raised serious, fundamental questions about how human beings are thinking, communicating and behaving.
Consider:

- Americans spend **4.7 hours** a day on their smartphones with **52%** of smartphone owners checking their phones a few times or more per hour.
- The Internet of Things:
  - **14.8 billion** “things” are currently connected—from personal devices to home appliances to vehicles.
  - Experts project **50 billion things will be connected by 2020**, and that’s just **2.77%** of an estimated **1.8 trillion potentially connectable things**.

In short, the Internet of Things will become the Internet of Everything. Human beings will move closer to singularity, relating to objects they didn’t have a relationship to before. Smartphones will advance to the point of being portable computer, while wearable technology will put the internet in our glasses, watches and more.

Perhaps the most visceral example of singularity is the increasing use and availability of live video. Though platforms like Periscope and Twitch have been around for a few years, Facebook’s foray into the livestreamed video world, with its **2 billion active worldwide users**, has suddenly given more than one quarter of the world the ability to broadcast their lives at any given moment.

We saw the raw power of Facebook Live when Diamond Reynolds pushed “Go Live” on her phone after a police officer shot her boyfriend, Philando Castile, during a traffic stop. The video gained more than **five million views on Facebook in one day**, and along with video footage of other recent police shootings, sparked protests against police brutality across the country. As one journalist put it, “for Philando Castile, social media was the only 911.”
Another result of this increasing singularity is that the once obvious distinction between reality and virtual reality is disappearing. Take the example of live tweeting during a televised event like the Super Bowl. Following a television event on Twitter in real time—participating in a global online conversation about a shared viewing experience—is a unique experience in its own right. In real time, viewers’ thoughts, beliefs and perceptions are shaped by the millions of other Twitter users who are participating with them. During Super Bowl 2016, an audience of 15.2 million people engaged with the game, halftime show, and ads on Twitter, and Super Bowl tweets were seen a total of 1.3 billion times throughout the night. In fact, research by Nielsen shows that Twitter TV activity “now stands as a bellwether for general audience engagement.” Social TV is both online and offline; it is a unique social experience that disrupts the distinction between the two.

Every time we leave the house with our smartphones, our Apple watches, our FitBits, we reinforce and live out this idea of singularity. We see and experience the world through the prism of the internet and the platforms built within it. There is no turning back. It is our job as members of the progressive movement to ensure that the internet and this notion of singularity is used for good and harnessed to achieve the positive change we seek, to uplift voices and leaders from our communities and amplify and echo our shared values.
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It’s the end of community as we knew it

(and we feel fine).

“We all sense that power is shifting in the world. We see increasing political protest, a crisis in representation and governance, and upstart businesses upending traditional industries. But the nature of this shift tends to be either wildly romanticized or dangerously underestimated.”

Jeremy Heimans  Founder and CEO, Purpose
Henry Timms  Executive Director, 92Y

The term ‘community’ increasingly demands a new definition. People are less connected and committed to just one institution or just one cause. Most of us are living more fragmented lives than in the past (despite being essentially connected to the entire world through social media). This is especially true for millennials, the largest generation outside of Baby Boomers. A Gallup survey notes that “while millennials are 11 times more likely than those of older generations to report using Twitter and are nearly 40% more likely to send and read emails, their levels of engagement and attachment with traditional political institutions and employers are significantly lower than those among members of older generations.”
The rise of the internet, smartphones and other connective technology has created a paradoxical and shifting sense of community for all Americans. We would argue that the behavior of millennials, the first generation to grow up in this new era of technology, is an indication of larger changes in the majority of communities across the country.

Not so long ago, social ties were primarily geographically based. The internet and, most importantly, our smart phones, have allowed us instant and constant communication with a global community. Today, at any moment or whim, a person can strike up a conversation with someone halfway across the globe. Not so long ago, that sort of communication would have been logistically difficult and socially awkward. Michael Rosenfeld of Stanford University who studies dating and technology notes “The telephone made it easier to be in contact, but only really with the people you already knew. You wouldn’t pick up the phone and call somebody you didn’t know. It would be awkward.” Now, not only is that sort of communication possible, the internet has made it socially acceptable to engage in conversations, argue and debate, and even form strong bonds with complete strangers.

Increasingly, people are forming new communities online centered on things they care about and not necessarily where they live. In that sense, people are more connected and also less connected than ever before. We are less friendly with our next door neighbor and more attached to the friend we met on the Harry Potter fanfiction website. Our new connectivity allows us to cultivate unique communities to fit our own personal tastes. While this is a wonderful and liberating phenomenon, the data on institutional membership decline suggests it also comes at the detriment of traditional in-person community ties.

“Welcome to the 21st century and nobody is answering their doors anymore. Assuming that people connect only to the people that live in a geographical vicinity to them is not true.”

Scott Goodstein
Founder & CEO, Revolution Messaging
While the decline of traditional membership models has been noted for two decades, the trend seems to be accelerating, especially with political organizing entities.

- Unions—which boasts one of the most powerful political operations—has seen its membership plummet from nearly one-third of working Americans 50 years ago, to one in 10 today.
- Even the seemingly invincible National Rifle Association membership numbers have declined in recent years.
- And the number of people who identify as Democratic or Republican and are loyal to a political party are at near historical lows.

To be clear, the observed reality is not a weakening of community ties as much as a shifting definition of community. People still crave community belonging and hunger for meaningful, face-to-face connection, understanding, and relationships. Hundreds of thousands of people showed up—in person, across the world—to participate in the Women’s March in January 2017, an event that was conceptualized and brought to scale through Facebook and organized by leaders, many of whom had never met before, primarily through email and phone.

However, the geographic ties of the past lent themselves to memberships and affiliations with one or two organizations that lasted a lifetime. These organizations provided the scaffolding and infrastructure to successfully support movements over the long haul and achieve lasting political change. In this shifting landscape, the challenge becomes how to leverage the changing nature of community ties without weakening or abandoning the institutions needed to provide stability to grassroots energy and movements.
A new form of people power.

“Thousands of community organizations across the country were founded by widening circles of listening to one another.”

Drew Astolfi
Center for Community Change organizer

In thinking about next-generation organizing, Jason Mogus and Tom Liacus in their Networked Change report encourage a concept they call “directed-network campaigns.” These are efforts in which organizations align with new sources of self-organized people power while still maintaining enough centralized structure to direct and frame that power.

They argue that “today’s empowered free agents and individuals, when called to support a cause or movement, quite simply want to contribute more and have more say over how things are done.” The watchword of the moment is crowdsourcing.

Crowdsourcing not only presents an opportunity to engage a large group of people to get better ideas, learn and grow as a movement, but it addresses the shifts in how people relate with power in a post-digital world.
Community organizing has long understood this and was doing crowdsourcing long before it had a name. Longtime community organizer and current senior organizer at CCC, Drew Astolfi described organizing techniques that we would consider forms of crowdsourcing:

“Thousands of community organizations across the country were founded by widening circles of listening to one another. Though these organizations were having these conversations face-to-face, this listening process was designed not just to learn from the community but to build solidarity, understanding and common purpose.”

Crowdsourcing isn’t new, it’s just the latest version of the listening process that has long served as the underpinning of community organizing. Directed-network campaigns give individuals and groups a say in shaping campaigns, building a shared commitment to the cause. If we as organizers can harness the creativity and the energy of individuals, we can mobilize people-powered campaigns that will win.
So, what do these shifting trends mean for organizers?

Individually and in combination, these trends stand to have a major impact on movement building and the organizations that engage in it. Many of these trendlines are occurring so rapidly and inconspicuously that it might be easy to overlook the profound implications. Indeed, “experts predict the internet will become ‘like electricity’ — less visible, yet more deeply embedded in people’s lives for good and ill.”

We know the old strategies alone will no longer suffice. Successful social change efforts of the future will require that we understand the trends and match them to the next generation of best practices. Here’s where we propose to start.

1. Tomorrow’s movement will be built on networks, not hierarchies.

2. Organizing will happen on an open scale.

3. The medium will be the message, and peer-to-peer influence will matter more than ever.

4. The boundary between online and offline will blur.

5. Adapt or die.

6. Power will look different, engagements will be elastic, and leadership will take on new meaning.

7. Content must be collaborative.

8. Intersectionality must be deliberately and thoughtfully baked in.

9. Effective messaging will use emotion to bridge—not widen—divides.
Tomorrow’s movements will be built on networks, not hierarchies.

**STRATEGY 1**

As noted by Chris Wells, a Journalism and Mass Communication professor at the University of Wisconsin, “the rise of the ‘network society’ has been characterized by specialization and globalization of the industrialized economies and other processes that decrease opportunities for forging strong, interest-based social organization on a traditional, local level.” Even the U.S. military is rapidly adapting away from pure command and control hierarchies. “To defeat a network, it takes network,” declares General Stanley McChrystal. He continues: “But fashioning ourselves to counter our enemy’s network was easier said than done, especially because it took time to learn what, exactly, made a network different. As we studied, experimented, and adjusted, it became apparent that an effective network involves much more than relaying data. A true network starts with robust communications connectivity, but also leverages physical and cultural proximity, shared purpose, established decision-making processes, personal relationships, and trust. Ultimately, a network is defined by how well it allows its members to see, decide, and effectively act.”
Organizing will happen on an open scale

**STRATEGY 2**

The internet allows for unprecedented access to people and to get to scale faster than ever before. It is possible to go from an idea to a movement in a matter of days. Over 50 years ago, The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom took at least nine months to plan, organize and execute. An impressive crowd of 250,000 people descended on the National Mall and heard Martin Luther King, Jr. deliver his “I Have a Dream” speech. The event is remembered as one of the great moments of organizing in the fight for civil rights. The Women’s March on Washington was organized in less than three months, drawing crowds close to 500,000 to the Mall, a feat that would have been impossible without the internet. It began with a single Facebook post that snowballed in popularity literally overnight, and the connective power of the internet allowed a fledgling idea to scale rapidly.
When the medium of communication changes, everything changes: our sense of identity; how value is created; the nature of our relationships. Tomorrow’s change-makers must understand that issues of medium aren’t just tactical. The focus can no longer remain on the message alone. As Marshall McLuhan cautioned, the “medium is the message”—and organizers will need to cognizant of this dynamic as they craft communication strategy.

Consider how, in 2008, Barack Obama’s presidential campaign was praised for its use of technology to augment and transform traditional community organizing techniques. In 2016, Bernie Sanders’ and Hillary Clinton’s campaigns were praised for their use of peer-to-peer text messaging applications (e.g. Hustle) to personalize the touchpoints campaigns made with voters and potential volunteers.

Donald Trump took a messier, but no less effective route in his campaign by loudly and publicly creating a reciprocal, direct line to and for his base through his personal Twitter account. Trump supporters were also adept at co-opting existing social media platforms, most notably on Reddit, to connect and build support for their candidate.

At the time, Trump’s use of Twitter was seen as amateur compared to the sleek and technology savvy tools in use by the Democratic campaigns. However, Trump and his supporters effectively tapped into what Obama did so well in 2008—creating vehicles and platforms for supporters to self-organize, support, connect and reinforce their values.

Trump’s tweets were and continue to be both a megaphone for his base and a direct line for his base to connect with Trump. His Twitter account makes him seem more accessible to his supporters. He circumvents traditional media barriers to getting his message out and relates directly with the people he wants to talk to. Though somewhat crude and simplistic in terms of technological savvy, the overall effect is the same as it was for Obama supporters in 2008: the openness of tools and platforms that allow for access, personalization and collaboration.
The boundary between online and offline will blur

Previously, offline activism was considered supreme. Now, the lines between offline and online are blurred and we need to create more effective one-stop shopping so people have multiple options to participate, across a variety of platforms and activities that demonstrate the cohesion between the two.

Organizers and planners of large conferences and events embrace this shift because technology allows deeper participation. From engaging directly with the speaker by tweeting hashtagged questions, pre-planning the event through social platforms, using data to personalize breakout sessions, and facilitating participant-to-participant engagement with dedicated apps, the opportunities to enhance and enrich event experiences are seemingly endless.

Mashable notes that with the ability to share video, documents and presentations after the event concludes, participants (and those unable to attend) have the ability to re-enter and re-deploy their learning and insights in the future. Because of evolving technology and our relationships with it, event planners have become experience-architects, whose

‘buildings’ remain standing even after the halls and auditoriums of the real-world space have emptied.”

This notion extends far beyond conferences and has implications for events that are organized to occur offline. Now, there must be an online component. When CCC and the Fair Immigration Reform Movement organized a cross-country bus tour for immigrant families to come to Washington, D.C. to share their stories with members of Congress during the 2013 immigration reform debate, there were events on the ground, but also ways for people to engage online. The campaign’s website was transformed into a virtual bus tour, allowing people to participate in the tour by listening to the stories of the bus riders and contributing their personal stories. This allowed for peer-to-peer connection, virtually and in-person.

By creating experiences that transcend the offline or online dichotomy, organizers can create a deeper sense of community and the social ties that people crave and can access in ways that are most comfortable and natural for them.
Adapt or die

STRATEGY 5

It might seem obvious, but communicating requires an audience. Consider the revolutionary democratizing influence of the printing press. The role of the telephone in allowing real time activation in organizing. President Franklin Roosevelt’s fireside chat radio broadcasts. Television’s impact on influencing the narrative of a country. Many technologists have spoken of the current rise of technology as at least as radical in its applications as these historic changes. Organizations now must be on social media. They must think about on-demand streaming video. And they need to consider mediums like podcasts.

Organizations still need to consider how their audiences get their information, but they must also consider that the people they need to reach get their information through multiple channels. New technology will come and go and the best organizations will commit to flexing with the best tools to reach and connect with our communities. Organizations will need to be flexible, adaptable and willing to experiment in order to stay relevant in changing times.
Power will look different, engagements will be elastic and leadership will take on new meanings.

STRATEGY 6

As old power organizations give way to new power models, we need to understand—and embrace—the concepts that will make our movements stronger. People are less interested in long-term “membership” and more willing to affiliate with a cause temporarily and join in an action (online and off) that speaks to a moment in time.

New power rewards collaboration over competition and rewards those who share, spread and build on ideas. Small “d” democracy rules in the new power paradigm and the people who are part of the movement want and need to feel empowered. Particularly those who are newer to political activity feel like they have an unalienable right to participate, and they want to be part of the agenda-setting process rather than sit on the sidelines. On the plus side, people are more likely to engage quickly and movements can build mass fast—think the March on Washington versus the Women’s March—the latter took one-third the time to organize and drew a crowd twice the size.

But breadth doesn’t equal depth and fast can be fickle. Because these new power structures lack strong relationships with members, people can move on quickly and movements can die out with no lasting infrastructure (Occupy Wall Street is a good example).

Organizations will be well-served by adopting some of the stronger elements of new power models—like authentic, meaningful participation and leadership by the people impacted by the issues—while not completely dismissing the value of old power. Old power models provide the built-in organization and infrastructure that allows organizations to campaign effectively, make strategic decisions and link to allies. That infrastructure is still necessary if we are going to successfully challenge and defeat institutional interests in elections, legislatures, board rooms and courtrooms.

Movements have always needed both scale and soul to thrive, but tomorrow’s movements will include a more diffuse, decentralized segment of influences that includes leaders, activists and the periphery. Think of it as concentric circles. At the core are the leaders. In the next circle are the activists—these are the people who are the heart and soul of the movement and are reminiscent of activists of the past. What’s newer is the essential nature of that next circle—the periphery.
A November 2015 study led by Professor Sandra González-Bailón of the University of Pennsylvania’s Annenberg School for Communication and Pablo Barberá of New York University concluded that “Slacktivists” — a derogatory and unfair term — play a critical role in extending the reach of social movements. Protest networks show a division of labor where there is a small minority active at the center, generating most of the messages, photos and content. Meanwhile a much larger group — “the critical periphery” as the researchers describe them — amplify and echo the messages from the core group. In many cases, these “slacktivists” may retweet only one or two messages, but in aggregate, their actions served to double the reach of the core protesters.

“If you want a product to go viral or you want a protest to grow, you need that influential core, but you also need the periphery echoing them,” says Professor González-Bailón. “Peripheral users are not ‘slacktivists.’ They are quintessential to understand why products go viral or protests go big.”

The periphery unleashes the power of communication through social technologies and multi-way communication. They amplify content creation and recruit their peers and provide social currency for movements.

New power movements and organizations not only recognize and harness the power of leaders, activists and the periphery, they embrace these roles as elastic and variable. Old power membership bases are inelastic and depend upon their memberships to remain constant year after year. While this model worked well in the past, the current whirlwind of our media and technology environment has conditioned us to a fast changing world that has affected our expectations for membership engagement. When someone sees a news story that makes them feel compelled to act, people want to be able to take action right away. Even if that action is simply a retweet or Facebook page like, both are meaningful forms of engagement that help build the periphery. And that person might stay in your organization’s periphery for months or years, until your organization’s engagement strategies or a breaking news catalyst propels them into additional forms of participation. In these moments, successful organizations will have built an engagement strategy to meet the need and build periphery engagement into activists, activists into leaders. On the flipside, the elasticity of engagement may also mean activists and leaders slide back into the periphery — and that is okay. Engagement will change over time. People will scale up and scale down their engagement based on their individual needs and in response to a variable media environment. Our current campaign and media environment is relentless. It is not realistic for organizations to expect the majority of individuals interested in their cause to remain activists or leaders for years in most cases. Instead, we should expect people to slide in and out of roles, customized to fit their own needs and the needs of the organization, campaign, movement at any given time. The point is, successful new power organizations understand elastic engagement and build participation models that work for their organization and supporters and within our variable world.

This new approach means leadership is essential for strong and successful movements. Leaders, now more than ever, need to reflect the grassroots they represent and be a part of the community and firmly grasp the elastic engagement of their “members.” Some of the most successful leaders will no doubt be homegrown products of the periphery. To help develop these new leaders and grow our bench, we should embrace the technology that is driving so much of this change.

One idea that supports and builds leadership to scale is the open source platforms. Interactive and smart digital platforms can provide customized opportunities to match people to movements, organizations and projects based on self-identified interest and skills, provide political education, identify new leaders and create personalized training and leadership tracks. Such platforms also allow for crowdsourcing content and campaigns or hosting intelligent messaging platforms similar to the artificial intelligence backed tool WorkIt that the worker center OUR Walmart is using to innovate labor organizing.
STRATEGY 7

To be powerful in the next phase, it is clear that future movements must generate much higher quality forms of original content. Think about creating content that will operate natively in this new ecosystem: rather than recycling news articles, it’s possible to create original content or a hybrid of existing content that doesn’t need to be placed with a news outlet. Getting a story in the New York Times is no longer the high bar of success because social media platforms allow organizations and movements to amplify content and reach both a larger and more targeted audience.

Content of the future will require reconceiving the old broadcast mindset and replacing it with a community-building paradigm. As Bonchek notes: “You aren’t giving a lecture anymore; you are hosting a dinner party. Your success is determined by how well you connect people together and keep the conversation going.”

To engage people at a deeper level and inspire action and long-term engagement, organizations should provide avenues for movement participants—not just leaders—to contribute and create content.

Bonchek calls this a shift from viewing people as consumers to seeing them as co-creators. The proliferation of social media and the rise of open hosting platforms for digital content hosting has made content creation and sharing easier than ever before.

Anyone with a smartphone can create and share content with the world, but even the type of content is changing. Video and images are the future, and “Facebook users watch an average of 100 million hours of video on mobile every day. Daily views have increased from 1 billion to 8 billion in one year’s time. Text posts, meanwhile, are declining year on year.”

There is also great potential for organizations to uplift their content as news in its own right, a tool that CCC piloted with its Communications Fellowships. We enable our communications fellows tell their stories and those of the people in their communities and across the nation living on the brink—stories that have been published in The New York Times, Washington Post, The Guardian, Vox and Salon, and gained thousands of views online.
Intersectionality must be deliberately and thoughtfully baked in

**Strategy 8**

Movements that embrace the full involvement of its participants—from agenda setting and strategy to tactics and ongoing engagement—must recognize they are part of a larger ecosystem and not working on a cause in isolation. Intersectionality has become a buzz word bordering on jargon, but the idea is essential for the progressive movement. Reflecting again on the Women’s March, it drew such a significant crowd in D.C. and in dozens of cities throughout the country because it was not singularly focused on one “women’s issue” but rather the totality of women’s experiences—from gender and race to reproductive rights and economic justice to health care and sexual orientation. The same is true for the Movement for Black Lives; its policy platform encompasses a wide range of issues, including criminal justice reform and policing, participatory budgeting and an end to privatization of education. People do not live single-issue lives, and effective movements must embrace the intersections in which we all live. What previously felt diffuse and unwieldy now feels inclusive and necessary.
Effective messaging will use emotion to bridge—not widen—divides

Over the past several years, CCC developed a five-step messaging approach, in conjunction with extensive research conducted by noted communication and research experts, Anat Shenker-Osorio and Celinda Lake:

- Lead with values
- Emphasize the ends
- Focus on lived experiences
- Name the causes
- Link the problem to the solution

This approach allows us to link deeply with individual’s values and vision and tap into their emotions. By starting with common values, we can then bridge the conversation into what that means with defined ideology, identity and common community. This winning messaging formula spans issues and can be applied to the progressive agenda writ large. Recently, CCC and Shenker-Osorio expanded upon these methods to build "Messaging this Moment: A Handbook for Progressive Communicators." Below is an example from the handbook that demonstrates this formula at work.

Excerpt from Fox News interview with Dorian Warren, President of CCC Action, about May Day protests for Immigrant Rights:

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**HOST** Dorian, very good to have you. If you’re going to summarize the protesting, what is it?

**DORIAN** It’s the administration, the Trump administration, deportation policies and machine. We’re saying no to separating families, no to a border wall and no to increased enforcement. There’s a different path forward and that is comprehensive immigration reform. It’s a bipartisan issue. It passed the Senate in 2013. It couldn’t get through this House that is trying to repeal Obamacare. This is a broad group of folks that are saying no to anti-immigrant policies. It’s Facebook and Google, by the way, as well as many other nonimmigrants like myself out here saying no to anti-immigration, separation.

**HOST** When you say anti-immigration, it’s anti-illegal immigration right?

**DORIAN** We want to keep families together. There’s a great history in this city of allowing immigrants to come in and contribute to this country and this economy... Again, business is joining with faith leaders and civil rights leaders, and the Sierra Club has joined in, Planned Parenthood have come in to say no to anti-immigrant rhetoric or policies.

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Organizers can use this messaging formula to inform speeches, web and social content, and especially media outreach. When asked why they took action on a media campaign, 41% of people surveyed by CCC said they did so after reading a compelling news story.
Opportunities for the Future

Nearly a year out, some of us are surely still grieving last year’s election, especially as we grapple with fresh rounds of injustice in each day’s news. But for progressive leaders, organizations and movements, the task at hand is urgent. We must face the changing communication and political landscape with clear eyes and a sound plan. We must craft new ways of planning, communicating and advancing social change that leverage today’s brave new world, instead of clinging to what worked for us in the past.

We learned a lot from the conversations and research that went into this paper, and we know there are still more lessons we and our allies must learn if we’re to bend the arc toward justice.

To sum up our key lessons, we believe that successful movements in the future will:

- Help shape and grow people’s inherent preferences into defined ideology, identity, demands and common community.
- Tap deeply into people’s values and vision for the world through effective, cohesive messaging.
- Transcend the false dichotomy of offline versus online.
- Allow peer-to-peer recruiting that has both scale and soul.
- Develop effective leaders who recognize the scale and scope of the challenge and reflect the communities they represent.
- Recognize the intersectionality of issues and find alignment around common causes.

Yet the list of new strategies does not—and should not—end here. CCC has been in the business of people-powered change for nearly 50 years. If we’ve learned one thing in that time, it’s that movement building, organizing, and advancing justice must continually evolve in the face of both opportunities and opposition. With this paper, we hope to map new ways forward, new best practices, and a new understanding of the dynamics we all must navigate to effect social change. Our success hinges on our ability to stay nimble, embrace learning, and pivot from setbacks along the way—and we don’t have a minute to waste.
Appendix

For the creation of this report, Center for Community change performed extensive research and referenced books, articles and journals, and additionally conducted over 20 interviews with organizers, communicators and experts. What follows is a list of sources directly referenced throughout the report. To view the entire list of sources consulted for this report and to explore more resources on this topic, please visit CCC’s website and go to the “Resources” page.

From Introduction:


From Trend 1:


From Trend 2:


From Trend 3:


From Trend 4:


From Trend 5:


From Shifting Trends:


From Strategy 1:


From Strategy 2:


From Strategy 3:
“The medium is the message.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_medium_is_the_message

From Strategy 4:

From Strategy 6:

From Strategy 7:

From Strategy 9:
“Revolutionizing the Way We Talk About Poverty.” Center for Community Change, ASO Communications and Lake Research Partners. 2014. https://communitychange.org/real-power/focus/message-research/