Power 50:
Transforming Systems Through the Leadership of Women of Color

Jennifer E. Cossyleon, PhD
Policy Advisor at Community Change
Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow

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Executive Summary

This report documents findings from interviews with 2018-2019 Power 50 Alumni, one year after their participation in the program. The experiences Power 50 Alumni share throughout this report highlight how program staff intentionally center and celebrate the personal experiences and strengths of women of color. Power 50 creates safe spaces for women of color to analyze social structures through a lens of intersectionality in order to name and process the overlapping oppressions women of color face as they fight to end systems of marginalization in their communities.

Within Power 50, Alumni describe supportive circles for processing racialized microaggressions, harms and triggers of movement work, and for strategizing anti-racist practices to implement in their community organizing leadership. Alumni highlight how Power 50 encourages them to lean into their intuitions and recognize their power. It provides spaces where sisterhood bonds could be formed, creating a movement within a movement, that includes healing and mutual encouragement for the continued fight for justice and community grounded power.

The leadership of Power 50 Alumni has only continued to evolve since their participation in the program. Not surprisingly, the components most emphasized by Alumni as unique parts of the program were the ones they began incorporating into their work. Alumni share how they utilized program learnings within their own teams and organizations. For instance, they incorporated healing and personal investment within everyday organizing practices. They built stronger relationships through coaching, mentoring, and by advocating for more women of color spaces. Alumni describe exercising their power to be more confident and trusting in their own intuition.

Alumni offer insight into their ongoing needs as they continue to evolve as organizational and community leaders. Among these include more opportunities for leadership development among women of color. They indicate interest in learning about the staffing structures needed for organizational sustainability, as well as gaining more skills like budget managing of large accounts. Alumni share a desire to build more connections with people and groups within policy, advocacy, and funding spaces, as well as organizers across issue areas, with the goal of strengthening each other's work, creating bolder visions for change, and securing necessary resources to advance social change efforts.

Overall, Alumni stress that programs like Power 50 are unique, necessary, and often non-existent for the many women of color organizers in the movement. In order to build a more just world, where everyone regardless of where they live, the color of their skin, or their immigration status can thrive, we need to support, uplift, and nurture the women of color who devote their lives to making this vision a reality.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 1

Power 50: LEARNING FROM THE 2018-2019 COHORT 2

How the Program Shapes Participants' Lives And Work 3

Transformative Organizing During COVID-19 3
Personal Investment From Staff: “Power 50 Was More About Me as a Person” 4
Centering Personal Experiences and Strengths 6
Racial Analysis: “I'm the Only Person of Color” 7
Leaning Into Intuition and “Recognizing Your Own Unique Power” 8
“More than a Sisterhood”: Building a Movement within a Movement 9
Healing: “Transforming Systems, But [also] Transforming People” 10

The Evolution of Participants' Leadership 11

Healing, Mentoring, and Leaning into Power 11
Alumni Updates and Visions 12

Ongoing Needs of Alumni 13

Leadership Development 13
Management and Technical Skills 14
Building Connections to Advance Movement Sustainability 15

APPENDIX A. METHODS 16
Acknowledgements

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Power 50 is a leadership development program of Community Change designed for women of color, by women of color, with the overarching goal of transforming organizing and uplifting organizers. It is open to women of color in mid- to upper-level leadership positions with Community Change’s partner organizations. The Power 50 program emphasizes people-first strategies of connecting and organizing. In addition to political education and power-building, the practices and tools incorporated in the program focus on healing, reflection, and a critical analysis of race relations in society. By exercising new, often non-traditional ways of leading, women of color leaders become better equipped to mobilize and support their members and create sustainable social change in local communities.

This report summarizes findings from follow-up interviews with Power 50 Alumni from the 2018-2019 cohort (1), the first cohort who participated. The purpose of these check-ins was three-fold. First, we wanted to document the first-hand impacts of Power 50 on participants’ lives and work. Most of the report focuses on this section, highlighting the areas that most resonated with Alumni and how these areas helped them to rethink or reorganize their leadership. Second, we sought to learn about the evolution of participants’ leadership since the end of the program. Here, we provide updates over the past year, shining a light on how Alumni attribute their accomplishments to their participation in Power 50. Third, we looked to better understand the ongoing needs of Alumni as they incorporate learnings and insights developed through Power 50. This information can help in the planning of future leadership programs and continued support for Power 50 Alumni’s leadership development. Last, an additional layer of discussion emerged during these conversations. Power 50 Alumni shared their experiences and transitions during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic — which is where the findings of this report begin.

(1) See Appendix for more on methodology
Like many organizers and leaders across the country, Power 50 Alumni experienced rising stress because of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the overall inadequate response of the federal government, Power 50 Alumni describe witnessing profit take priority over people, gravely impacting women of color, who are disproportionately essential workers and caregivers. Amidst the hardships experienced by Alumni, their families, and their communities, Power 50 leaders created room for re-planning and reflection, and executed necessary transitions to action by calling on transformative organizing practices.

Roxana, from OneAmerica, shared how the COVID-19 pandemic pushed her to recognize it was a key time to plan before jumping into action: “For a movement to be successful, we have to slow down and strategize,” says Roxana. Often in organizing, the urgency and necessity of policy change leaves little time for critical thought about how to best support the people on your team. Yet, Power 50 Alumni were intentional about slowing down. Arleen, from the Washington Interfaith Network (now staff at OneAmerica), explains how she responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by holding more space for reflection in a time of physical distancing. Her organizing team began sending daily photos and reflections along with weekly video wrap-ups. The team shared pertinent campaign updates, as well as “how they’re doing, how their soul is doing,” says Arleen, pointing to the growing need to create supportive movement spaces, albeit virtually, to respond to the current moment.

Alumni across the country switched gears and transitioned much of their in-person organizing into digital organizing. Alumni continued to organize and lead boldly. For many, their work was focused on the 2020 presidential election, which ultimately led to the Biden-Harris win. “COVID-19 has not stopped [organizing] at all,” said Erica from The New Georgia Project. She explained how door-to-door voting registration among 60 canvassers quickly transitioned into campaign research, digital organizing, and phone outreach. Similar to others, Erica described the need for support and reflection during the COVID-19 pandemic; in her case she emphasized her personal goals and visions. “So before COVID-19, I probably had a totally different vision. Now I’ve been able to really slow down and just like really take a deep look at some things.” Erica realized she wants to return to school, and be a fully independent leadership coach within the movement. She describes Power 50 and the ongoing Power 50 community as helping her feel “more grounded,” more than any other leadership development program in which she has participated in the past.

Ana from Colorado People’s Alliance was also in a moment of reflection, thinking seriously about sustainability and how she could personally continue this important fight. “We’re working so many hours in a day. It’s feeling very emotionally draining, but this work is so big that it’s not going to happen overnight, and we’re going to have to keep going for a really long time,” says Ana, adding
Transformative organizing teaches political education and power-building as a way of addressing injustice and it does so in a unique way by centering “long-term vision, self-awareness, naming and addressing oppression that is replicated in our strategies, and the healing of personal suffering” (Tung in Calling In and Up 2020, p 21). Beyond rejecting transactional forms of organizing that often lead to short-term wins and reharming of organizers, particularly women of color, transformative organizing focuses on mutual support for organizers to lead fruitful personal and professional lives.

Alumni point to their adaptation of transformative organizing to confront increased hardship during the pandemic. During the Power 50 program, staff guided them to celebrate the power of women of color, their ancestors, create “liberated zones” for healing, and construct spaces of mutual support and change (2). Within their current work amidst a global pandemic, Alumni describe slowing down and strategizing, providing spaces for personal “soul” updates among team members, and recognizing they have all of the “tools” they need to succeed. Each of these are adapted strategies of transformative organizing, at a time when crisis heightens the urgency of collective action, but also collective healing.

To understand how the program continues to contour participants’ lives and organizing work, it is important to highlight a few of the components of the program that Alumni described as unique and why.

**Personal Investment From Staff: “Power 50 Was More About Me as a Person”**

Overwhelmingly, Power 50 Alumni emphasize a deep sense of newfound personal investment through their engagement with the program. Alumni embraced how program staff focused on them on a personal level through direct, intentional practices. Some of these practices included transforming plain physical spaces into ones decorated with bright, inviting colors, fabrics and textures. Staff covered walls with images and photographs, they lit tables with candles, played familiar music, and arranged plants, oils, and stones for the group to enjoy. Staff shared quotes and books written by women of color like Gloria Anzaldua, adrienne maree brown and Shirley Chisholm. The group shared meals together amidst...
beautiful scenic views, spaces were babies were welcomed and celebrated. In these spaces, Alumni felt welcomed and saw reflections of their kin experiences and practices. Alicia, from Kentuckians For The Commonwealth, describes how Power 50 staff transformed “stale spaces” into “cultural celebrations.” These intentional practices helped women feel grounded and encouraged mutual sharing. Celesté from Texas Organizing Project describes how staff created a “beautiful” room, incorporated breathing exercises, and decorated a table with items that honored people who have passed away. Eboni from Mothering Justice says, “It’s not just your typical leadership program where you come in, you have a packet, you have an agenda.” Instead, Eboni outlines the combination of intentional staff practices, storytelling, mutual support, and structural analysis of society, that make Power 50 unique. Each of these practices was important for creating space to identify and develop leadership and organizing capacities.

Alumni credited staff for creating safe spaces for sharing and mutual growth, even among leaders who were at first hesitant or resistant to opening up among new peers, like Alicia. “[Staff were] brilliant in the way they oriented us to the space,” said Alicia, in part because of how the intentionality of staff affected her willingness to engage and share. In the following quote, Alicia describes her experience from one of her first Power 50 gatherings:

> We did a lot of sharing, which is definitely not a part of my comfort level generally... I can't remember the specifics of the exercise, but... somebody was asked to come up and share and actually work through their prompt in front of the whole group. I don't know if I volunteered or I was volunteered... I don't remember, but I think it was just the first time that I peeled back my layers and kind of just shared with the group and just ended up crying and processing... I felt like that was the first time in that group that I've really-- I think in any group that I've felt comfortable opening up.

Alumni echoed common experiences in these uplifting environments, where program staff created the opportunity for leaders to “be your full self,” “grow together,” and receive mutual support. In the next quote, Ana expands on why this is particularly important for women of color:

> It's a space where you're allowed to show that you don't have all the answers all the time... I just really felt really invested in... as women of color, as organizers, like we're not often invested into that level... as an organizer, no one's going to treat you to a nice dinner... it's little things like that put all together that really make you feel like you're valued, you're important, you're worth investing in.

Opposed to solely engaging with Power 50 leaders as tireless vessels for social change, Community Change program staff honored and celebrated women and their ancestors for their commitment to the movement.

Janay, from Communities Creating Opportunity, pinpoints how “Power 50 was more about me as a person,” adding how she has “never been in an environment [of] women that I had not known before and... feel comfortable.” “You're given permission to be transparent,” added Janay while explaining how she is “forever grateful for the opportunity” to participate in the Power 50 program. She describes the program as “life-changing” for many reasons, including the connections she formed and the recognition that Community Change staff saw “something in me.”
Shanae, from Topeka Justice, Unity, & Ministry Project (JUMP), similarly describes how she felt personal investment:

“The culture that the facilitators built to really invest and pour into me as a person. It’s just phenomenal; like every time we turned a corner, I was like, “They’re doing this for us?”... You know, it was just crazy that at every turn, every corner, there was a way to pour into me as an individual.

This deep sense of investment in many ways contrasts their daily work as organizers and women of color amidst predominantly white spaces. Alumni often cared for and uplifted other people, and placed less attention on themselves, their gifts, and their needs. In contrast, Power 50 staff were intentional about personally investing in participants through their interactions with them, the content they created, and the spaces they adorned to reflect and honor their shared experiences.

**Centering Personal Experiences and Strengths**

One of the program components Alumni describe as most powerful is spending time reflecting on the intersections of their personal histories and their organizing work. Organizers and leaders are often directly impacted by the same institutions and policies they are trying to transform including immigration, education, and mass incarceration. But, as Alicia notes, within community organizing, “we often just erase staff voices and staff experiences, which is doubly hard when you’re a staff of color.” Through Power 50, Alicia and others appreciated the space to think about themselves within the context of community organizing and the movement. Alicia says the program pushed her to “think about the power that you possess and how you are going to display that or utilize that out in the world.”

Within the program, centering personal experience was closely aligned with recognizing personal strengths. As Shanae describes, “[Power 50] helped me to understand what my strengths are and what it looks like to be operating from a place of strength all the time.” Similarly, Janay explains:

“[Staff] would say to us, ‘you have everything you need,’ and I really took that to heart because before Power 50, I was lacking this, I was lacking that, I didn’t have this, I didn’t have that. I don’t have the skills, I don’t know this... And that whole ‘You have everything,’ like I really internalized that and I stopped being self-conscious about a lot of things and it really did help me walk in my power and understand that I have a lot, and what I don’t have, I can get or I can connect with someone that has it. So it helped with a change of mindset.

Overwhelmingly, Alumni speak of a shift from doubt to power as they built relationships and recognized their many gifts among other women of color. In the next quote, Ana describes how Power 50 validated her feelings when she most needed it and helped her to push forward:

“I was just feeling really demoralized, I was really hopeless. I was feeling really raw emotionally all the time. And I feel like Power 50 for me, it was like a lifeline. It was one, validation of, “It’s okay to feel those feelings. It makes sense that you’re feeling those feelings, it’s right that you’re feeling those feelings. There’s no wrong way to experience life, especially as an organizer doing this really hard work, and just having that sense of like, people got your back, people care about you, people are invested in you, that was really powerful for me.”
Racial Analysis: “I’m the Only Person of Color”

Power 50 programming did not shy away from racial analysis but rather took a deep dive into talking about the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, economic insecurity and other forms of oppression that show up for leaders within their everyday lives and work. Together they dove into intersectionality, a lens, as Kimberlé Crenshaw (3) describes, for seeing how multiple forms of inequality operate in unison and exacerbate one another. This component of the program was welcomed by Alumni, as it allowed them to process and challenge compounding structural barriers they and others on their teams experienced every day.

For many Alumni, their places of work at times felt isolating. “I'm the only person of color on our management team,” says Alicia as she describes her work environment. Alicia explains how Power 50 helped her to strategize ways of dismantling inequity while guarding herself in the process:

> So I think the skill set that I've honed in Power 50 is really trying to confront the white supremacist culture that I am seeing and figure out how to do that in a way that doesn't completely stress me out but is trying to hold my fellow management team accountable.

Alicia says she began “coaching” her non-Black team members and leading by example. She asked her management team to think about their actions, their words, and how these affect staff, saying phrases like "If we haven't created this culture, who has?" Alicia says she is now more aware of how she “perpetuated some pieces of white supremacy culture,” often without even realizing it, and strived to “be better” by modeling intentional anti-racist behavior.

Conversations that dove into intersectionality helped Alumni to process personal experiences among a community of other women of color facing similar challenges. Eboni describes this process as moving away from solely “dealing with [microaggressions] in our heads and on our own” as well as moving away from focusing on how to make others more comfortable by bringing these important conversations “to the forefront and talking about it.” Eboni shares that this experience made the microaggressions at work “a real thing” they could talk about and process.

These deep dives into race and gender oppression also helped Alumni to have a language to better support leaders and staff they worked with. Celesté describes having an increased awareness of how generational marginalization deeply contours the lives and actions of the organizers and community members she interacts with. In the next quote Celesté describes this process for her and how it has helped her better understand her leaders and staff:

> Power 50 really softened me and helped me think about-- you know, the history of that kind of, like leaders and staff both, but our leaders especially come from deep places of oppression and that manifests itself in very different ways, and I think I've been better able to absorb that than I was prepared to b before because of Power 50.

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(3) https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/
I would always second guess myself, always look to somebody else for the answers to fill. But that was one of the first things that we talked through in Seattle [Power 50 gathering], was that our intuition is some of our best qualities and that as Black women and Brown women, we bring that into every space we enter.

Some Alumni, like Jennifer from Our Future West Virginia (now a staff member at Community Change), report making changes to recruit more women of color to their organizations. “I was the only Black person on my team when I took the job,” says Jennifer. Within nine months, she had hired three young, talented Black women. Jennifer believes she would have eventually brought in more Black women “to some extent.” Nonetheless, her Power 50 experience reinforced the need for these new staff hires, in part, because the program led her to lean into her intuitions, as she explains in the following quote:

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Jennifer mentions a moment during Power 50 that stuck out for her because of the way staff unapologetically and with “confidence and power” switched gears to adapt to the needs of the cohort. “My intuition is telling me this isn’t the right move for this group,” Jennifer recalls hearing. “I had never seen somebody who was a facilitator do that ever,” says Jennifer describing her surprise. “Life’s energy changes and when it changes, you go with it. You adapt. And so Aida [program staff] being able to trust that and then admit to it and change it right in front of my eyes was — She was impactful... the most powerful moment was when she modeled out [listening to her intuition] for me,” says Jennifer. Black and Brown women “should be valued and lifted up” for our many gifts, explains Jennifer, and when we listen to our intuition, this is one of the many ways we acknowledge these gifts.

Through open conversations about gender, race, racism, and how it operates within even the most progressive movements, Ana feels better equipped to support Black organizers in particular, and to engage in multicultural organizing.

**Leaning Into Intuition and “Recognizing Your Own Unique Power”**

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Echoing similar sentiments, Laura from the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada explains, “I feel like Power 50 is recognizing your own unique power as a woman of color... recognizing that power and how to kind of project that power.” Laura describes how Black women like her, in an executive director position, need mutual support. “Power 50 has helped me to be honest, not walk away” she said frankly, explaining how Power 50 helped to equip her with leadership skills and a network of support from other Black women and other women of color across the country in similar leadership positions. “This is the work that I love, and I know that I can do it... Power 50 has provided what I needed to be able to do this,” said Laura.

“More than a Sisterhood”: Building a Movement within a Movement

Power 50 Alumni spoke of building a sisterhood through the program as having multiple interlocking meanings and benefits. Alumni detail how connecting to other women of color organizers in leadership positions was powerful, having often felt alone in their organizations. “Leadership can feel so isolating,” says Roxana, as she described the pressure of “building up women of color for these leadership roles” while fighting against entrenched structures of marginalization that she acknowledges cannot be changed individually. “I think just having that support in Power 50 and knowing that other people have been struggling with the same things has been really really instrumental for me since the program ended,” says Roxana. Similarly, Shanae names the unique space created by Power 50. “[A] beautiful component of the cohort is just being in solidarity and in sisterhood with women of color. There’s no other space that I have been provided that opportunity,” says Shanae. Before Power 50, Shanae says the only organizers she had ever been around and communicated with were in the DART network, “So that was one thing that was very, very, very impressionable for me,” adds Shanae.

Alumni share their enthusiasm to learn and support one another in triumphs and struggles, recognizing their need for validation, supportive conversations, and mutual accountability among women who look like them. Alumni, like Janay, describe Power 50 as a unique and eye-opening experience among women of color. “It just opened my eyes a lot deeper. You know, being exposed to all these different women all across the country and hearing the work that they’re doing, things about them on a personal level, their struggles, it was all just very meaningful,” says Janay.

Alumni describe the bond formed through Power 50 as a movement within a movement. Celesté names her experience with the cohort as “comforting,” describing how “it was just very affirming to be in a room, not only with Black and Brown women who had experienced the same things as me, but really amazing, intelligent, powerful, talented organizers.” Celesté adds that the community like the one developed through Power 50, where she looked around and saw herself reflected, “feeds you and serves you, and then you’re able to go back into the larger movement and withstand all the things that it does to us.”

Alumni recognize movement building and fighting for their communities as difficult work, which necessitates a system of support that nurtures and replenishes. Unlike other programs, Jennifer sees her ties to other Power 50 Alumni as permanent, as she explains in the following quote:

“I’m connected to the women in that cohort for the rest of my life. Like we still communicate, and we still love to see each other. We still love to hear from each other, and I’ve never had that in other similar cohort situations. It was easy for me to go through the motions, get through the program, go about my life, and never look back. But this is something that’s lasting."
Alumni continue to connect via phone, WhatsApp group messaging, and email, sharing resources, announcements, and questions. The relationship-building process continues among participants long after the Power 50 program gatherings have ended— an aspect that some describe as healing, as we turn to next.

**Healing: “Transforming Systems, But [also] Transforming People”**

As a result of Power 50, several Alumni point to the increased recognition that movements could be vehicles for healing. Alumni’s organizing work often entails fighting to end the social and economic pains of families and communities. This work, regardless of the fulfillment that it brings, is demanding, heavy, and in some cases, triggering. As Ana puts it, “It’s been hard for us to lead when we’re dealing with our own trauma,” she says, adding “how are you fostering spaces where you’re recognizing people’s own humanity in your own work? In Power 50, we really leaned into us acknowledging that.”

A core component of transformative organizing is naming and addressing oppression and healing personal suffering (see page 4). In her own words, Roxana explains transformative organizing and movement building as two interconnected processes: “fighting for justice” and “healing from the pain of oppression.” She recalls feeling tension with “mainstream organizing” that did not create space for what some might criticize as “touchy-feely” support and healing. But, after engaging in Power 50, Roxana says she “felt so much more confident bringing that vision into the organization and just being bold.” She continues, “If our movement can’t be places where we tend to our own wounds... then what are we really doing? A big part of our movement is not only about transforming systems, but [also] transforming people,” adds Roxana. She continues to incorporate healing spaces within her work and hired Arleen, a co-participant of Power 50, as an organizing director where they are “now creating a culture of Power 50 within our own organization.”

Janay also speaks of the importance of the healing spaces she found in Power 50 among women who are similarly fighting for social justice. In the next quote, Janay describes place-based inequity, its impact on students, and her need for outlets to process:

> I do a lot of work in schools and I see the difference in schools in the suburban areas, in the schools in the urban areas... It hurts so much to see children have a lack when they don't have to lack. So just being able to talk about how that makes a person feel when they see that, and when they are working every day, and when you are trying to make a difference and it just feels like you're getting nowhere. Being able to be vulnerable with [Power 50] women and cry and be comforted. And just to be given hope. To see, like I said, the work that all these women are doing, the wonderful work that they're doing all over the country. And I wish I could verbalize better the impact that it has because it has truly had an impact on my work.

Community organizing often brings slow progress that Alumni like Janay recognize as not happening fast enough. Yet, having a space to process, be vulnerable, and gain hope among like-minded women of color helps Janay to continue this work.
The Evolution of Participants' Leadership

Alumni rejected any suggestion that the Power 50 program had ended, but rather agreed there had been a transition to make room for another cohort of women. Many Alumni kept close connections with other program participants, continued to reach out to staff for check-ins, and looked forward to monthly calls planned by Aida and Trish, Power 50 Alumni, and other Community Change staff and partners. A year after transitioning out of the programmatic phase of Power 50, Alumni describe its lasting impacts on their organizing and leadership. A few broad areas where Alumni emphasize putting their learnings into practice include advocating for healing spaces, emphasizing mentorship, and leaning into their power as women of color.

Healing, Mentoring, and Leaning into Power

Shanae, for instance, has made an unprecedented ask to lead a space for uplifting the importance of healing within an organizing training. “I propositioned the executive director of the DART Network to allocate time for me in the organizer training module for self-care and transformative organizing practices,” says Shanae, adding “I never would’ve done that” before participating in Power 50.

Other Alumni talk about transitions they have leaned into within mentoring practices and opportunities. Jennifer mentions building and reaching for more opportunities for peer-mentoring. In the following quote, she explains further:

“it’s sometimes without me knowing, and it’s sometimes very intentional... [creating] that mentorship relationship to develop other leaders here in West Virginia, particularly Black women, [which] has happened since Power 50. So I’ve been able to create spaces for Black women where I actually named it. Like, we need a space just for us.

Naming the need for peer support and actualizing this need among peers is a key takeaway and implementation of leadership development.

Just as important, Alumni describe taking the lead to create more supportive spaces for interacting with their staff. Arleen now incorporates a section focused on how staff “is coming into the room” physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually (PIES). Arleen believes knowing how people are entering a meeting is an important and necessary prerequisite for offering feedback or direction. Admitting this is among some of her new practices, Arleen says: “So, those are the things that I don’t think I could’ve ever imagined doing in a workplace [before Power 50] but always felt the need for it.” Power 50 has led Arleen and other Alumni to imagine new possibilities and make them a reality.
Likewise, Erica shares trying new techniques with the seven organizers she supervises. “I definitely want to be more of a coach than a supervisor to them. So I’ve been incorporating some of the things that Trish [program staff] and I go over when we check in,” says Erica. She mentions “brain dumps” and sharing the top three things for the week as small ways to brainstorm and create a more collaborative environment that blurs organizational hierarchy. This is important for Erica because it entails more relationship building, instead of solely interacting with organizers for the products and numbers they produce.

The last broad area Alumni mention as having a lasting impact on them is leaning into their power as women of color. Alumni describe this in different ways. Celesté feels more confident to “take up space” and ask questions about organizing structures and practices: “I think [Power 50] rooted me in a way that allowed me to do that,” she says. Roxana realizes more than ever her skill of building teams with common bold visions for change. Dreams that before felt like “push[ing] for the impossible,” now feel like “more of a reality,” she explains. Alicia instills more trust in her decisions and leadership, despite continuing to work with predominantly white colleagues. “I think Power 50 put part of the trusting myself and my leadership and standing in that [leadership, which] has definitely shifted over the last year.” Ana finds more clarity after the “hard conversations that we had [in Power 50],” which in her words, has “allowed me to get where I am today.”

Alumni Updates and Visions

Other updates from Alumni over the past year include running for public office (only 100 votes short of being elected), winning campaigns with grassroots leaders, listening to their intuition more, being more forgiving with themselves, and overall feeling more grounded in their life visions. These important updates are only the beginning for Alumni who report big visions for the future.

Alumni report future goals both for the movement and themselves. Some of these include: ensuring directly impacted people are leading immigrant justice work; working within leadership of an organization of color that centers the lived experience and leadership of women of color; building a youth development and family fun park; creating an intergenerational and intersectional organization; and having more freedom to volunteer and support more social justice organizations. Other visions include developing solidarity across communities of color, including Black, immigrant, and Native organizations, remaining part of the movement forever, and being “embraced,” even if working outside of organizing within policy or for an elected official. Overall, Alumni remained hopeful and steadfast about the collective action work ahead. As Arleen said, “I hope that in ten years, I’m still surrounded by people that are still thinking about impossible things and are striving towards it.”

To reach these visions, Alumni need backup, as we all do. In the following section, we highlight the top needs of Alumni as they navigate their current positions and prepare themselves and their teams to reach future personal and collective goals.
Ongoing Needs of Alumni

Alumni offer insights into their ongoing needs, many of which build on the foundations introduced by the Power 50 program. They offer suggestions for how Community Change, funders, and other people in the movement could support and uplift their leadership. Main themes include their continued interest in: leadership development among supportive communities; openings to increase their management and technical skills; and continuing to build connections across issue areas, and with advocates, policymakers, and funders.

Leadership Development

Overwhelmingly, Alumni share the necessity of continuing and expanding the Power 50 leadership development program and the support it provides. As Arleen says. “The no-brainer is to continue to support the Power 50 program… it’s something very new, something that I’ve never seen before.” Alumni point to the utility of Power 50 for new organizers and women of color who are stepping into leadership positions at their organizations. Shanae describes how programs like Power 50 can help to retain organizers who might otherwise exit the movement. “We need new organizers to be nurtured and cultivated and not to come into this work, get run to the ground and leave and go do something else,” she says, explaining how Power 50 is one of the “best things” Community Change can do to support women of color organizers.

Alumni emphasize how having a supportive leadership development environment for mid-level staff organizers helps women of color like them to navigate white supremacist and patriarchal terrains that make their organizing work increasingly challenging. Roxana describes, “If Community Change is really committed to building a pipeline for women of color, like this sort of support and training is important at [the mid- to upper management] level,” particularly because there are often less leadership building opportunities at this level.

Other Alumni express the need for supportive leadership development for all women of color working in their communities. “I want to send as many people from our organization [to Power 50] as possible,” Celesté states. “I would love to see it open up a little bit more,” suggests Jennifer, explaining how any Black woman doing “heavy-duty work in her community” could benefit. Alicia admits how she kept thinking about “grassroots leaders that would be well-suited” and benefit from Power 50. “I caught myself wanting to nominate so many folks who would benefit, but they’re out of the scope of Community Change,” Arleen similarly mentions.

Last, a couple of Alumni emphasize the need for supportive leadership development during the current moment, and how Alumni could come together more to support one another during the pandemic. For example, Erica poses the question: “So how do we create community, especially now when we all are social distancing and we need more support than we would’ve normally needed in the field?” The global crisis only increases the necessity of supportive spaces, like the spaces created by Power 50, to learn, connect, heal, and recharge.
Management and Technical Skills

Given that many Alumni were trained primarily as organizers and moved their way into leadership positions, they often inherited aspects of the job that were less familiar. Some areas where Alumni indicate the need for continued support are in building strong staffing structures and larger scale budgeting skills.

Alumni like Laura recognize the importance of having a strong staffing structure to support their organizing campaigns. She explains navigating pressure from multiple areas of her organization. When she first started working with her current organization, she was a communications director, supervised four organizers, and handled much of the administrative tasks, grant writing and reporting, and fundraising. In the following quote, Laura offers examples of how everyday maintenance on top of her other job responsibilities can be overwhelming:

“Because our main office was in Reno, where our founder lives, there was no admin in our office. So I was actually like, you know, if a light broke, I was having to fix it, or if you know how to call a plumber, I would do it because there was no admin. And I don't want anyone else to feel that way… With how big Community Change is and then all the other organizations they work with, just ideas about what is a strong staffing structure that actually gets the work done, but [rather] makes it so you don't have one person like going crazy with a bunch of work.

Laura suggests larger organizations with time-tested staffing structures could lend some guidance to smaller organizations in the movement who must balance fiscal responsibility and the juggling of multiple roles, which can be difficult to sustain long-term.

Besides capacity concerns with staffing structures, Alumni like Alicia share an interest in gaining different organizational management skills. In the case of Alicia, she delegates budget managing responsibilities to another person in her organization. However, she wants to be able to do this herself in order to be a more informed leader. In the following quote, Alicia expands on her reasoning:

“I've never controlled a program budget. Like, I'm leading statewide electoral work and I don't actually control a budget. I just tell somebody else what I want to do and they figure out how it's going to work. So things like that of just hard skills that I can't lead anybody's organization if I don't know how to build and manage a budget on a broader level. Like I've done it small scale, so I think those opportunities, a little more hard skill development would be appreciated from Community Change.
Alumni identify Community Change as having power and influence through policy, advocacy, and philanthropic spaces. Alumni highlight their interest in becoming more connected to these spaces for several overlapping reasons. One reason is to be more in tune to national groups working on political strategizing. For example, Alicia states, “I’m really new to the national networks and organizations and such and so I also am trying to figure out how to navigate that... So just trying to figure out how to build some strategic alignment.” Connecting to national groups is an important part of piecing together and elevating the local work happening in Alumni’s communities.

Another reason some Alumni hope to continue to expand their networks is to learn about sources of funding, which can be helpful for staffing and for planning local actions (e.g. lobby days where dozens of people travel to the state capitol). Several Alumni describe how funding needs shape the types of activities and decisions that become incorporated into their work, including fundraising and the number of organizing positions they hold. Another key example is how grant money often requires reporting—some more onerous than others. The rationale “Here’s $20,000, now write me a 4,000-word summary every month,” is something Alumni were accustomed to. But ultimately, like Celesté suggests, one way to support organizations run by women of color is to push for stable funding and increased representation and visibility of women of color in philanthropic boardrooms. Alumni were confident Community Change could continue to uplift the work of women of color and simultaneously influence funding decisions.

And finally, Alumni mention wanting to expand their connections, mainly to one another, but also to groups outside of their orbit, in order to deepen the strength of directly impacted communities of color in the movement. Alumni point to Community Change as “well-positioned” to continue to increase visibility and solidarity across communities of color, including spaces for visioning. “How do we heal some of the things that have happened between our communities that are keeping us in the status quo and not fighting for bigger things?” Asks Roxana. For her, the prospects for more cross-movement and cross-community visioning gives her “a lot of hope.” Thus, beyond spaces for mutual support and development, Alumni like Roxana point to the many ways visioning and winning together across communities requires an intersectional lens, critical racial analysis, and a steadfast realization that together we are stronger—components that are front and center in the Power 50 leadership development program.
APPENDIX A. METHODS

I used qualitative methods to document the experiences of Power 50 Alumni through one-on-one interview check-ins. In particular, I held Zoom video calls with 11 Power 50 Alumni from the 2018-2019 cohort. Trish Tchume invited Alumni to participate in an interview with me through a personalized email, which in large part, led to the high response rate of 92 percent (11 of 12 Alumni participated). Trish Tchume, Aida Cuadrado Bozzo, and Zuri Tau collaborated with me on the development of interview questions, which I used to guide these conversations. I conducted interviews from March 25, 2020 to April 9, 2020 and audio recorded our conversations with permission, which were transcribed verbatim and shared with participants.

The research did not include direct observations of the Power 50 leadership development program. Rather, the themes that emerged and are highlighted in this report come directly from one-on-one conversations with Alumni.