

Beyond the First Click

How today's volunteers build power for movements and NGOs

change.org

MOB LAB

CAPULET

The logo for change.org, featuring the text "change.org" in white lowercase letters on a red rectangular background.

Change.org is the world's largest petition platform, using technology to empower more than 170 million users to create the change they want to see.

The Mobilisation Lab exists to transform how campaigns are fought and won, providing a forward-looking space to envision, test, and roll out creative new means of inspiring larger networks of leaders and people around the world to create positive change.

The logo for CAPULET, featuring the word "CAPULET" in blue uppercase letters on a dark blue rectangular background.

Capulet makes Remarkables—high-impact digital marketing campaigns that attract attention and get people fired up about causes and organisations who are making positive change in the world.

What is this report?

If movements and organizations invest in and cultivate supporters who are doing substantial and meaningful work, then does their reach, impact and odds of success increase?

That's the question we set out to explore.

We wanted to look under the hood of orgs that are doing a great job of engaging their top-tier supporters and volunteer leaders. That is, those supporters and volunteers who are empowered to make decisions and act on behalf of the organisation.

We sought to uncover insights, patterns and best practices that we could share with our colleagues in the nonprofit sector.

We interviewed 35 organizations and experts in eight countries. Here's what we learned.

Chapters

- I. Level up volunteer leaders with one-on-one coaching
- II. Volunteers at their best: Personal achievement matters
- III. Blend mobilising with organising for scale
- IV. Match big asks with remarkable experiences
- V. Technology investments can bias mobilising over organising
- VI. Collective identity leads to collective action

01 | Level up volunteer leaders with one-on-one coaching



Janice Staab and Danni Washington are two of Audubon's TogetherGreen Fellows. Photos courtesy of Audubon.

When organisations invest in coaching and capacity-building for volunteers, their volunteers become leaders and a source of power for the organisation.

ALL OUT

“There’s not a day at All Out when we’re not coaching partners and volunteers who are on-the-ground moving campaigns forward.

Leandro Ramos, Director of Programs, All Out

Audubon's “gold standard” coaching program

Audubon's TogetherGreen program—funded by Toyota in the year Prius hit one million sales worldwide—invested more than \$20 million in coaching and supporting volunteer leaders.

From 2008 to 2014, TogetherGreen granted hundreds of \$10K fellowships to high-potential local leaders.

TogetherGreen provided grassroots advocacy training and one-on-one coaching on topics like fundraising, communications, conservation planning and diversity and inclusion.

Following TogetherGreen, Audubon created a Chief Network Officer position and completed a new strategic plan to focus on the health, well-being and capacity of the Audubon network.



TogetherGreen Fellow, Jacelyn Downey. Photo courtesy of Audubon.





We coached leaders on how to have a conversation with a city official and how to act in a city council meeting. Trainees used these skills right away to see how it all felt in real life. They tried it, they were successful and they were hooked.

TogetherGreen really validated for us the importance and potential of training efforts. Audubon has enormous goals that can only be accomplished with a broad and capable network. We can't do it with a network that lacks capacity.

David Ringer, Chief Network Officer,
National Audubon Society





Audubon's results

- Fellows led programs that improved 41,658 acres of habitat and 16 million gallons of water.
- Programs, led by local leaders, engaged more than 686,000 people in 310 cities and all 50 states.
- Funded 766 environmental projects.
- Logged \$12.2 million dollars worth of volunteer hours.
- Partnered with more than 4000 organisations across the country.



You don't need a \$20 million dollar grant from a partner to build powerful volunteer leaders.



SURJ's goal is to mobilise seven million white people to actively participate in the movement to end white supremacy and build a racially just society. That just can't be done without volunteer leaders with very big responsibilities.

Randall Smith, National Staff Team,
Showing Up for Racial Justice

Volunteer leaders amplify a small staff at Showing Up for Racial Justice

Showing Up for Racial Justice has a small staff (two full time, three to six part-time), so levelling-up volunteers into leadership positions is fundamental to its theory of change.

Training includes multiple coaching calls each week on topics like how to run a chapter, how to canvass, how to talk to white people about racial justice, how to fundraise, and so forth.

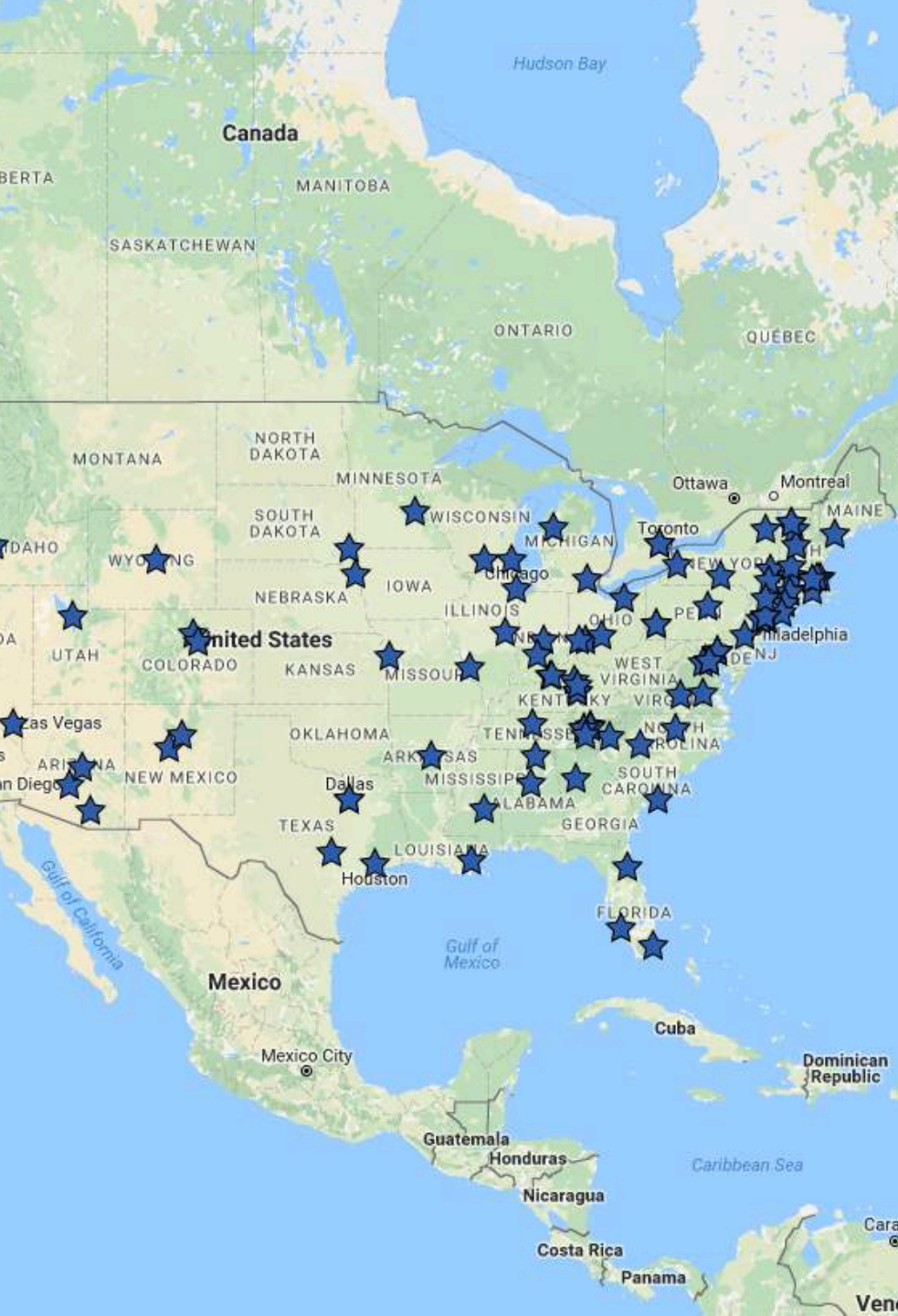
SURJ amplifies coaching with a Slack team and private Facebook groups for peer coaching and dialogue. In most organizations, online supporters tend to be on the sidelines. But at SURJ, once they take action, join the Slack channel, make personal relationships and get coaching from peers, they begin taking bigger actions and move into leadership roles.

“[Volunteers] need to be in accountability relationships with people of color organisers, know how to develop strategies and tactics that are appropriate for their context and have the ability to support the hundreds or thousands of people in their area to take meaningful action,” said Randall Smith, National Staff Team. “Without these leaders SURJ wouldn't exist.”



Photo courtesy of Marj Kleinman.





SURJ's results

- Grew from 12 chapters to 150 chapters in just two years.
- SURJ has inspired more than 250,000 people to participate in offline actions.
- More than 200 volunteers on the SURJ Slack channel and 6000 people in closed Facebook groups.
- Dozens of actions, from sit-ins to canvasses, are planned by and run by volunteers.



Elijah van der Giessen talks global mentorship



Elijah van der Giessen is the Community Manager at NetSquared, a global network of technology meetups for nonprofits.

He mentors and coaches seven regional leaders who, in turn, do one-on-one coaching with organisers in their areas and also take on responsibility for meetup outcomes.



Reflections on volunteer coaching

1. How does your organisation coach volunteers?
2. Is there a partner or foundation that could provide resources for levelling-up volunteers?
3. How could a Fellowship model work in your organisation?
4. Which “on-the-job” skills can you teach to volunteers who will practice them immediately in the real world?
5. Who on staff—if anyone—focuses on your volunteers’ health, happiness and success?
6. Is there an existing training model you can tap into without having to develop your own coaching curriculum?

02 | Volunteers at their best: Personal achievement matters



Photo from Haiyya's Power of 49 campaign.

When organisations treat volunteers more like staff, by involving them in strategy and tracking their performance, then volunteers become more invested in their own and the organisation's success.



For programmers, your resume is the robustness of your GitHub profile. Code for America gave people a chance to work on real tech projects. That was a motivating factor for many volunteers.

Catherine Bracy, former Director of Community Organising,
Code for America

Haiyya encourages personal and collective success

Haiyya Fellows are trained in community organising strategy and then design and run campaigns on civic issues in their own neighbourhoods.

“We make expectations very clear. Our Fellows should feel they’re working at a job, even if they already have a job or are a full-time student. A Fellow’s self-interest in making her campaign a success is often the anchor and motivation. But then, that shifts to collective success,” said Aprajita Pandey, Executive Director, Haiyya.

More from the Haiyya Fellows program, [watch the video](#).



Photo courtesy of Haiyya.



I never thought I could be coaching and mentoring people! Haiyya invested in my leadership and my passion; in no time I found myself becoming a part of the team.

Soon after, in Delhi, Haiyya launched the 6th Cohort of Haiyya Fellowships and I was assigned the role of a Training Corp, wherein I was coaching, training and mentoring the Fellows spread across Delhi. It felt amazing to identify with that exhilaration of, “Yes, I can do it!”



Anjali Prabhakar
Haiyya Fellow



Haiyya's results

- Seven Haiyya Fellows and 16 core team members registered 30,000 first-time voters in Mumbai.
- Fellows formed teams of local volunteers in Mumbai called Bandra Bravehearts who helped neighbours file police reports and taught citizens about Rights to Information.
- Twenty-eight volunteer organisers engaged over 900 volunteers in teams that put pressure on local candidates to address pressing citizen issues in their campaigns.



Michael Silberman on treating volunteers like staff



As National Meetup Director for the Howard Dean presidential campaign, Silberman trusted volunteers to accept staff-level responsibilities. Listen to why he thinks holding volunteers accountable works for organisations *and* volunteers.

Jae Cameron on how volunteers can contribute to strategy



Volunteers around the world join committees that set Hollaback's strategy for ending harassment.

“Everyone is contributing at a high rate; I feel like they’re more than staff. They’re like consultants coming in. They’re really leading the conversation.”



Reflections on volunteer contributions and performance

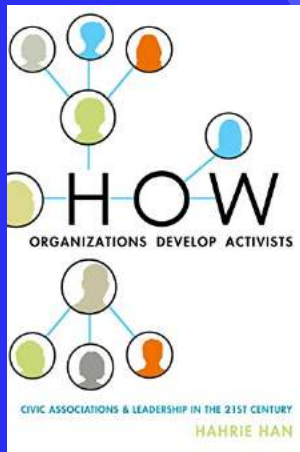
1. Do volunteer leaders contribute to strategy at your organisation? How?
2. Does your organisation back away from giving volunteers mission-critical work and holding them accountable for outcomes? Why?
3. Aside from number of volunteer hours, which metrics do you use to track volunteer performance? For example, how does their work contribute to the mission? Does the work add to your volunteers' sense of well-being, contribution and place in society?
4. What steps can you take to support personal successes for your volunteers?

03 | Blend mobilising with organising for scale



Photo by Joe Brusky.

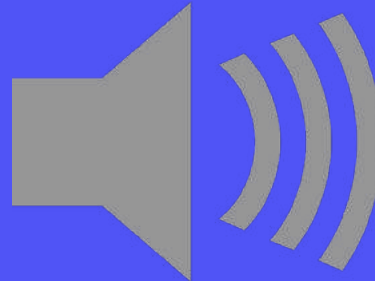
Combining web-based movement-building techniques with a deep commitment to training and nurturing top-tier volunteers builds stronger, distributed volunteer networks more quickly.



What I found to be so interesting was that organisations that were consistently able to engage people at scale were the ones that blended mobilising and organising.

Hahrie Han, author of *How Organizations Develop Activists*

Hahrie Han on mobilising and organising



LISTEN

Academic and author Hahrie Han, on the difference between mobilising and organising and what can happen when organisations blend the two techniques.

Fossil Free goes deep and wide

350.org is a world-class mobiliser known for supporting mass public actions around the world. Its Fossil Free campaign uses mobilising techniques—petitions and public actions—to put pressure on institutions to divest from fossil fuels and reinvest in solutions to climate change.

350.org is also going deep to scale the Fossil Free movement. They're teaching organisers specialized skills to build distributed teams of activists at campuses across North America.

The Fossil Free Fellowship program is a paid summer internship. Hand-picked Fellows complete week-long 350.org training and are placed with host organisations to get hands-on organising experience. Interestingly, hosts aren't always environmental groups—they can be unions or social justice organisations.



Photo courtesy of 350.org.



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We've made a very intentional effort to train individuals so they can help broaden the movement. This is a way to build out capacity throughout the nonprofit sector and to do coalition building between issues areas. The Fellowship experience can be a turning point in their lives and on what kinds of work they choose to do. After the Fellowship, they've got organising chops!

Anna Goldstein, US Team Coordinator, 350.org





350.org's results

- Fossil Free has spread to more than 500 campuses and institutions globally, thanks to the work of volunteer organisers.
- Alongside its Fellows program, Fossil Free continues mobilising work. It supports partners and campaigns with online petitions and organising kits in places like the UK, where 25% of universities have now divested from fossil fuels.
- “Being a Fellow brought me into community with other strong, determined organisers and allowed me to find my own role in this fight. It gave me hope, and taught me lessons that will carry me through organising for climate justice for the long haul.”
– Lex Barlowe (2014 Fellow), Oakland, CA



GetUp! mobilises at scale

GetUp! mobilises more than a million Australians on social justice, economic fairness and environmental sustainability issues. In the lead up to the 2016 federal election, GetUp! experimented with high-level volunteer actions.

GetUp! doesn't typically do large-scale training, but for the election campaign they taught volunteers how to run call centers and talk to citizens about voting issues. Those volunteer leaders, in turn, trained more volunteers.



Photo courtesy of Andrew Hill.



GetUp! results

Fast, effective campaign growth. GetUp! made 40,218 calls to undecided voters. During the campaign, 36,000 GetUp! members collectively donated almost \$3 million dollars to fund the effort.

“We were starting to see the calling program scale exponentially,” said Paul Oosting, National Director. “Trying to do a campaign of that size in a centralized way would have been very limited by staff capacity.”



Reflections on blending mobilising and organising

1. Does your organisation rely on a mobilising model, an organising model or both?
2. What opportunities are there for you to go deep with volunteers? How could they support the mobilising work you're already doing?
3. Alternatively, how well are you able to mobilise members—to create opportunities for involvement that match interests that people already have.
4. What would a light-weight, agile experiment with mobilising or organising look like for your org?

04 | Match big asks with remarkable experiences



Photo by Jen Wilson.

Nonprofits can ask more when volunteers anticipate and then encounter exceptional or unique experiences.

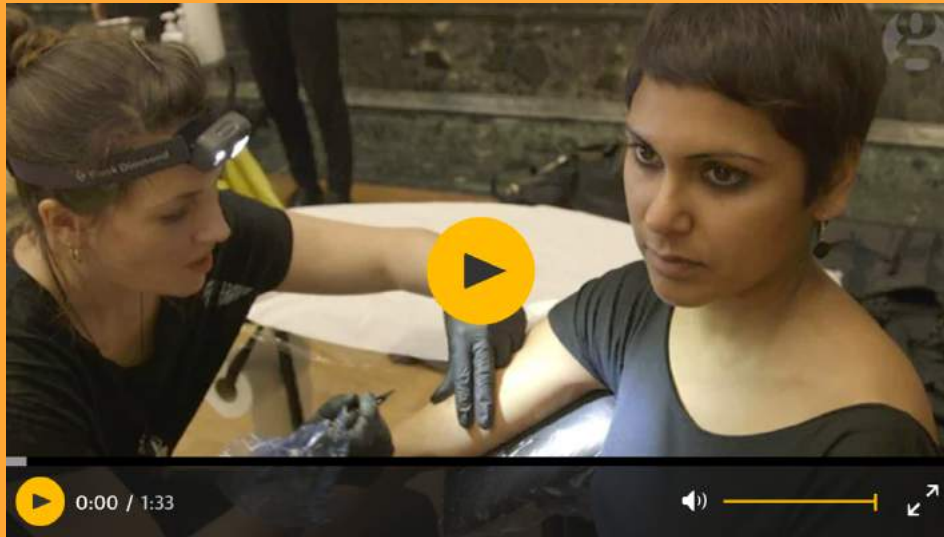


Action Lab is a four-day training conference where we bring our top activists to DC. It's a big commitment, both for Global Zero and for the volunteer leaders, but it pays dividends. We're able to give them such a powerful experience that 60% of Action Lab participants stay engaged and lead movements in their communities.

Zack Deutsch-Gross, Field Manager, Global Zero

Public participation, skin deep

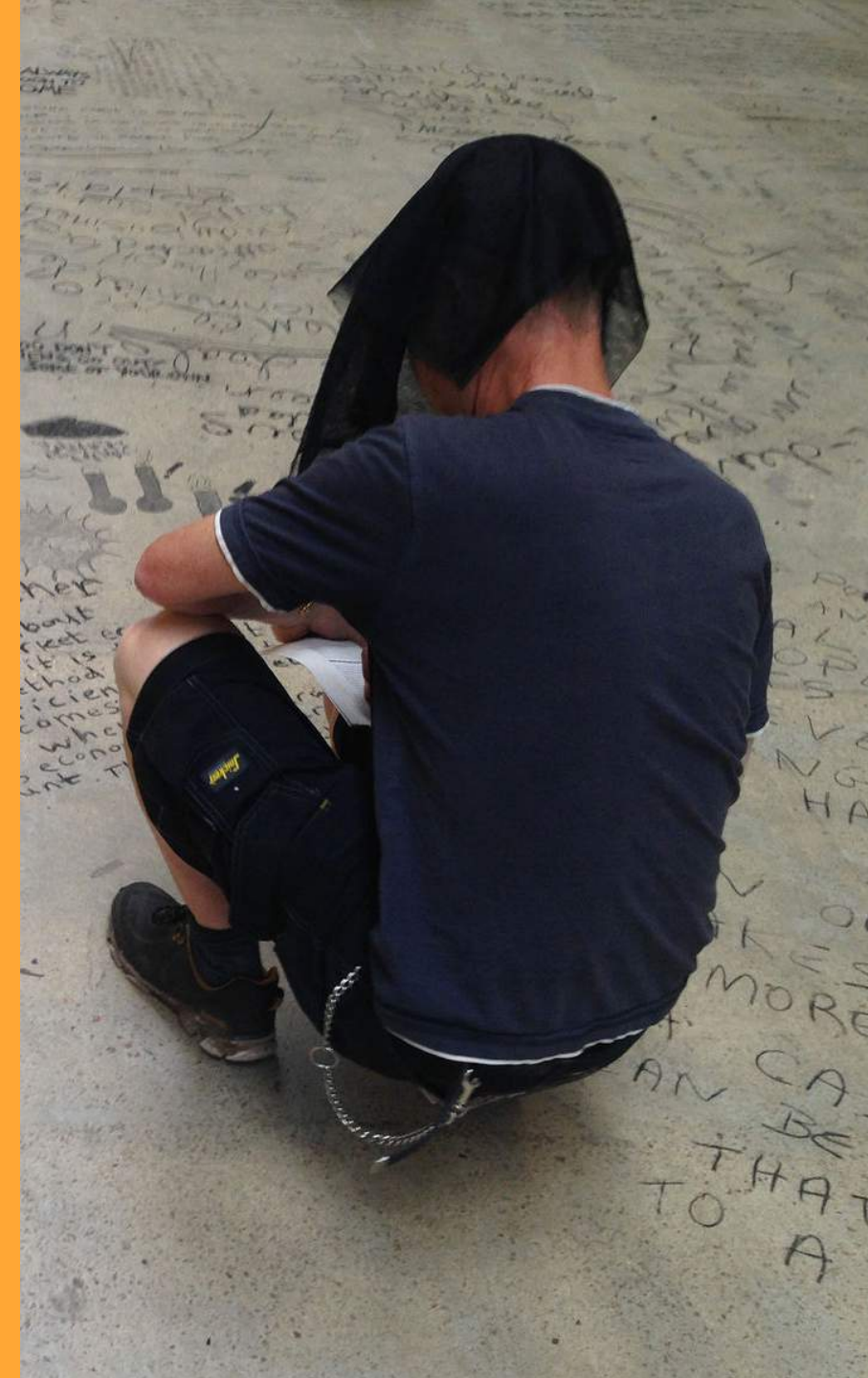
Liberate Tate is an artist collective in the UK dedicated to creative acts of disobedience against the funding of Tate museums by oil companies. Over six years, most Liberate Tate actions took the form of unsanctioned performances inside Tate museums.



Volunteers tattooing one another inside the Tate Britain in protest of BP's sponsorship of the gallery, [watch the video](#).



Photo courtesy of Flickr user Lewisham Dreamer.



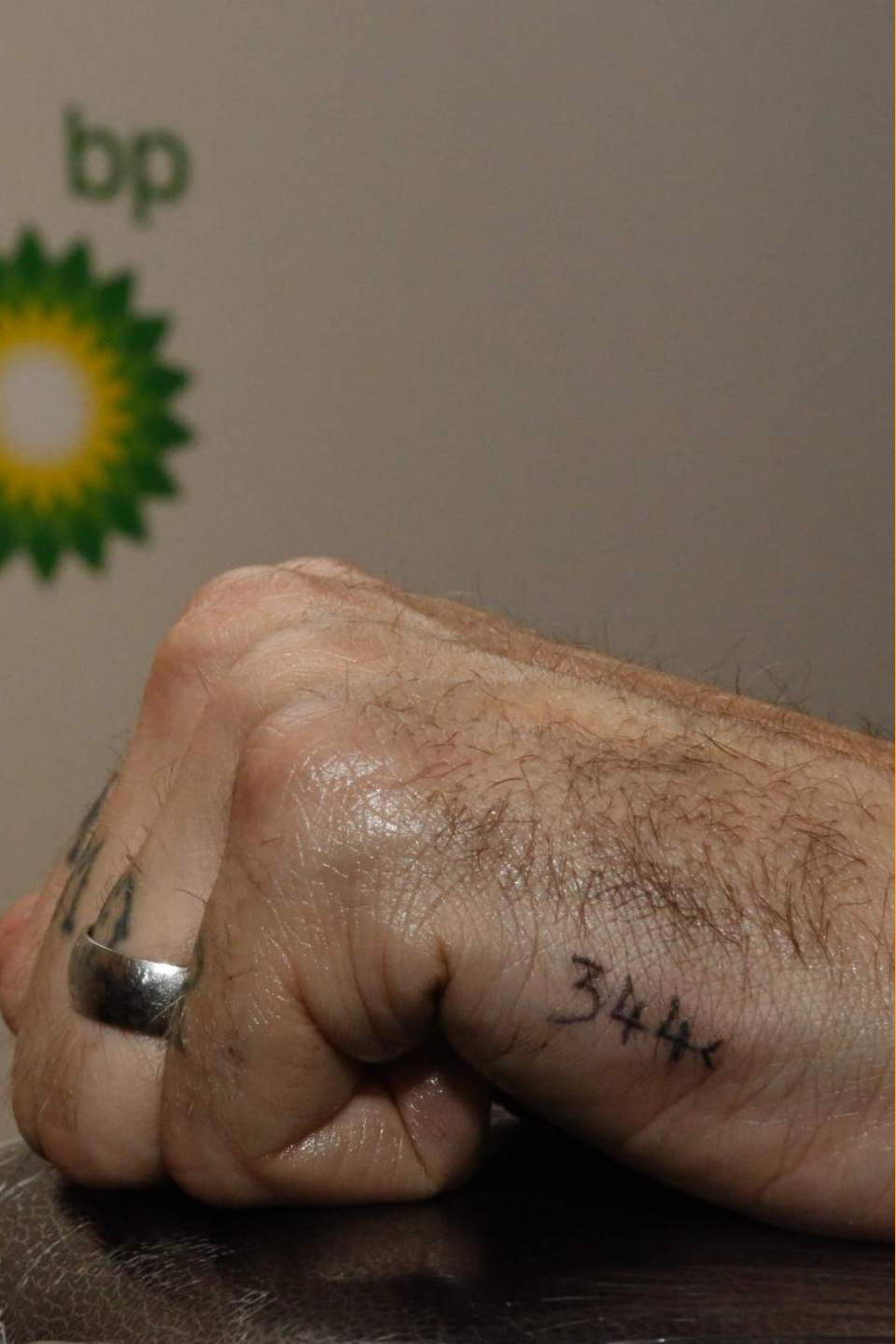


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In accepting a tattoo, you [the volunteer] literally are making permanent something from Liberate Tate. We are also giving something that is to you that gift we call the birthmark—the tattoo of the level of CO2 in the year you were born. So these are quite intense experiences.



Glen Tarman,
Liberate Tate



Liberate Tate's results



Tarman talks about how Liberate Tate makes exceptional volunteer experiences.

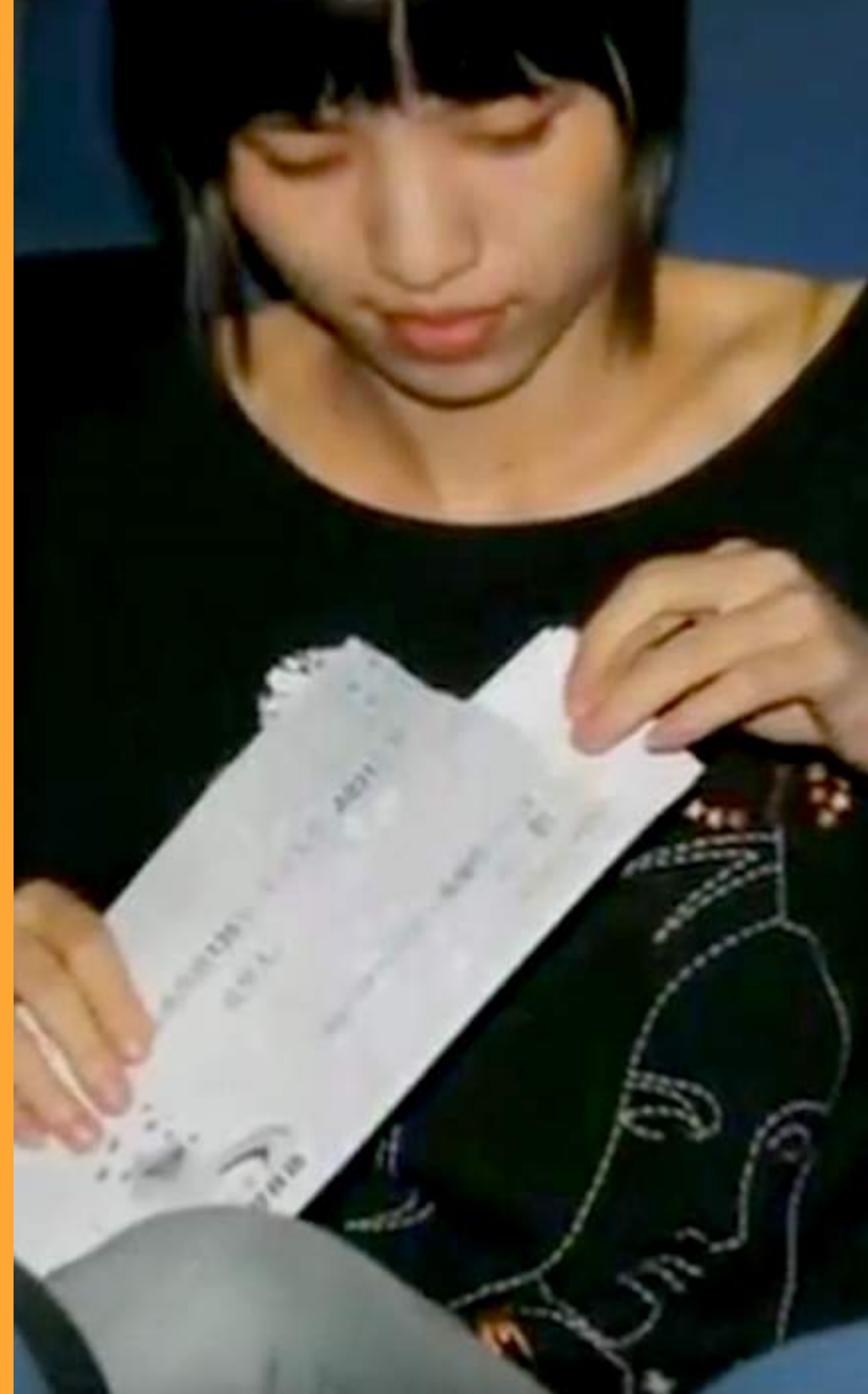
- Activists and the public get the unique experience of participating in an artistic process with working artists.
- Volunteers become actors in public performances.
- Being tattooed by fellow volunteers is high on the commitment curve! In the piece, “Human Cost” volunteers agreed to be naked and covered in oil inside the gallery.
- In the spring of 2016, BP announced it will end its 26-year-long sponsorship of Tate.



Pen pal relationships for left-behind children in China

Blue Envelope Project—also referred to as Blue Letter Project—is an NGO started in 2008 by university students in order to improve the mental health and wellbeing of “left-behind children”—children whose parents migrate to cities to work and so must leave their children with relatives who are not always able to care for them. There are 61 million left-behind children in China; many end up in rural boarding schools.

Zhou Wenhau, Secretary-General of the Blue Envelope Project, says there have been few programs that address the emotional needs of left-behind children, who, he says, suffer most from a “lack of security and a sense of presence.”





Blue Envelope Project's results

- Blue Envelope connects college students with left-behind children. Volunteer students are trained and then travel to rural areas to meet their future pen pals.
- Volunteers agree to become the missing “presence” for these kids and to help their long-term emotional development—a big responsibility knowing that failing as a pen pal will re-enforce a child’s sense of abandonment.
- Since 2008, the program has engaged more than 3000 Chinese university students who maintain regular written correspondence and build meaningful, long-term relationships with left-behind children.
- In 2015, Blue Envelope program began sending full-time volunteers to schools to work with left-behind children.



“Adopt A Dive Site” for highly-committed volunteers



Project AWARE super-contributor Jack Fishman, on scuba diving for trash. It sounds onerous, but Fishman says it can be a transformational experience.

Reflections on creating remarkable volunteer experiences

1. What do volunteers look forward to most when working with your organisation?
2. How can you make volunteering a remarkable experience?
3. What new or unique experiences can volunteers expect when they work with your org?
4. Do you back away from asking volunteers to make big commitments—emotionally and/or logistically?
5. In what ways can you explore and support your volunteers' interests rather than simply expecting them to support yours?

05 | Technology investments can bias mobilising over organising



Photo by Michel Francon.

Orgs have invested heavily in mobilising technology such as CRMs, petition platforms and social media. While this tech is an effective way to achieve large-scale mobilisation, it's often unhelpful in organising volunteers. As a result, many organisations haven't implemented technology specific to organising or training top-level volunteers.



The tools that exist today are mostly focused on broadcasting to 500K people rather than recording one-to-one conversations.

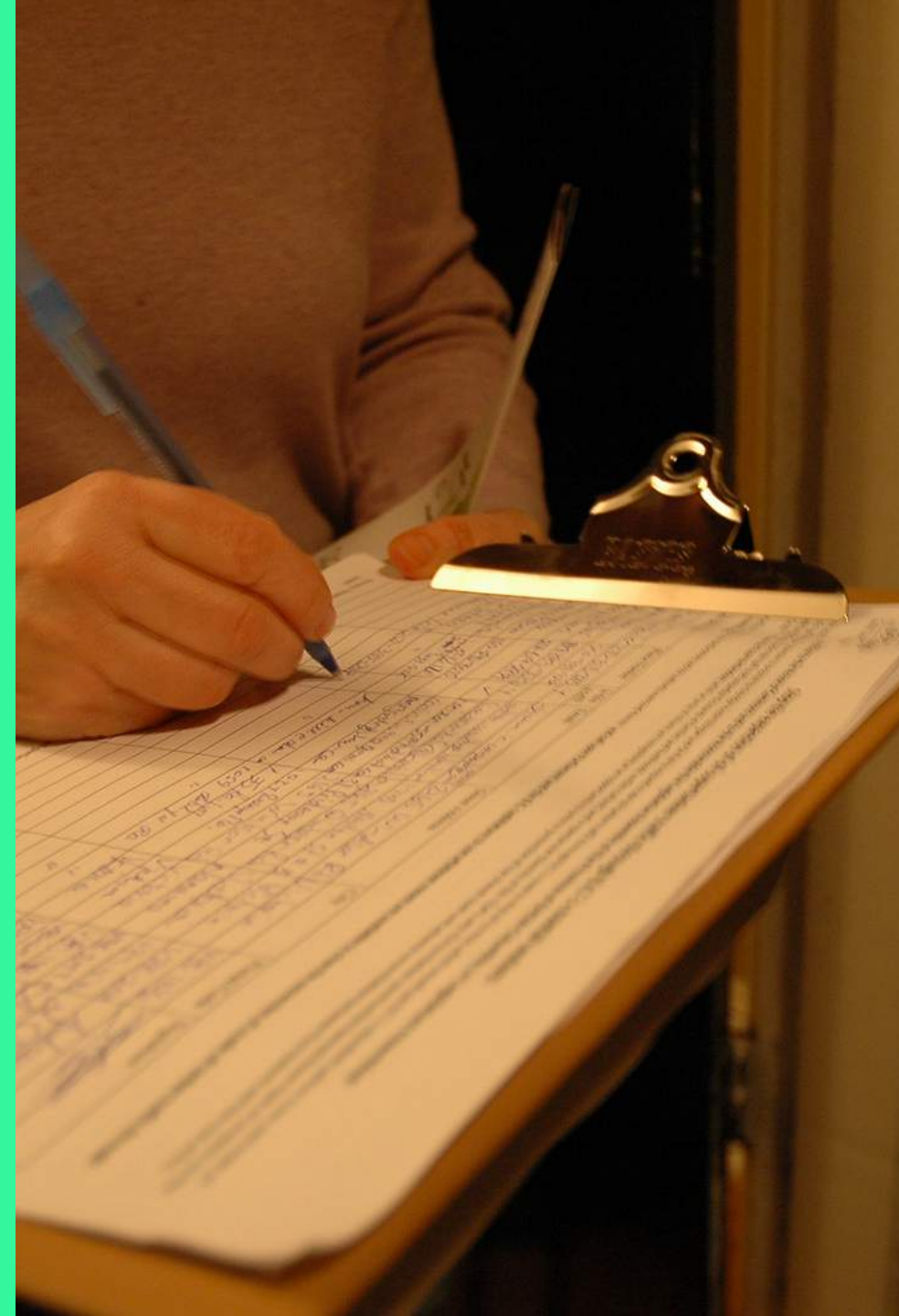
Nathan Woodhull, Executive Director, Control Shift Labs

An emphasis on digital can mean an emphasis on mobilising

Over the past 15 years, mobilising technology has become increasingly sophisticated and commonplace, but organising technology hasn't kept pace or become as popular.

The roots of digital mobilisation are in one-to-many broadcast tools. Part of this divergence is because orgs view mobilising as an online-first activity and organising as an offline-first activity. A number of mostly-digital orgs reported an intentional de-emphasis on organising.

"Look at the individual as a whole person, rather than as a profile," says Emily Schwartz, Vice President of Organising at NationBuilder. "That's the key: identifying the segment where an ask will have the greatest impact. That possibility exists, but really only the top orgs are doing it. . . . There are some poorly-aligned incentives around, for example, email list size as one of the ways people get funding."





“

The under-25 crowd understood the notion that Facebook doesn't win elections, that posting to social media doesn't move votes. What we needed to do was use social media to organize people to actually do the one-on-one voter contact that's proven to have the biggest impact on moving voters to the polls. That work is going door-to-door, getting on the phone and talking to voters live.

Becky Bond, senior advisor to Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, author of *Rules for Revolutionaries: How Big organising Can Change Everything*



Building new technologies when the old ones don't apply

In some cases, when a group can't find the right technology to enable their organising work, they build their own.

The National Domestic Workers Alliance launched Fair Care Labs as a skunkworks for connecting and empowering workers.

“We felt that there is tremendous opportunity with technology, and we're willing to spend time experimenting with new strategies,” said Palak Shah, director of Fair Care Labs. “Is there engagement that can help us achieve our movement's goals or are there ways we can produce our own products, and harness the power of the digital era on behalf of workers?”



Designing inspiring campaigns with the community

The Wikimedia Foundation runs community-led initiatives to design and build tools their movement needs to connect deeply with members.

The Foundation runs idea labs associated with its “Inspire” campaigns. These annual campaigns address issues inside the community, like the gender gap in editors or issues of harassment.

Wikimedia believes solutions to community issues usually come from the community itself. The “Inspire” campaigns support innovation and collaboration, up to and including the funding of successful ideas.





“Digital technologies that we have nowadays are amazing. They allow us to get to scale in a way we have never been able to before.

As with any new technology, though, there are upsides and downsides. The digital tools we have right now lend themselves more easily to mobilising than they do to organising.

At the very forefront of civic technology is the question, ‘can we use digital tools now to do the transformational work we’ve known how to do for years and years?’

Organisations right now are experimenting with how they can create digital spaces where people engage in the kind of transformational work that builds their capacity, their sense of agency and their willingness to stay involved over time.

Hahrie Han, Author

Reflections on technology's bias toward mobilisation

1. In what ways does your organisation over-emphasize mobilisation?
2. How well does your org's current technology set enable your organising efforts?
3. The 'high touch' practices of an org's fundraising team can often be adapted to organising work. Are there lessons to share among departments in your organisation?
4. Is there a gap between tracking online actions and offline organising?
5. Are you applying the right metrics to your organising work?

06 | Collective identity leads to collective action



Photo courtesy of Naireeta Services.

**Identifying with a movement isn't just emblematic;
it can be an impetus for action.**



At 350.org, people experience what it feels like to be part of a global movement. They share stories from across the world and make real connections with each other.

Anna Goldstein, US Team Coordinator, 350.org



“

Participatory leadership builds participatory communities. Mass mobilisation at key moments does not sustain action. What does are activities that allow people to engage on personally-relevant, local issues that are connected to the broader values of the movement.

Erin Mazursky,
Founder, Rhize

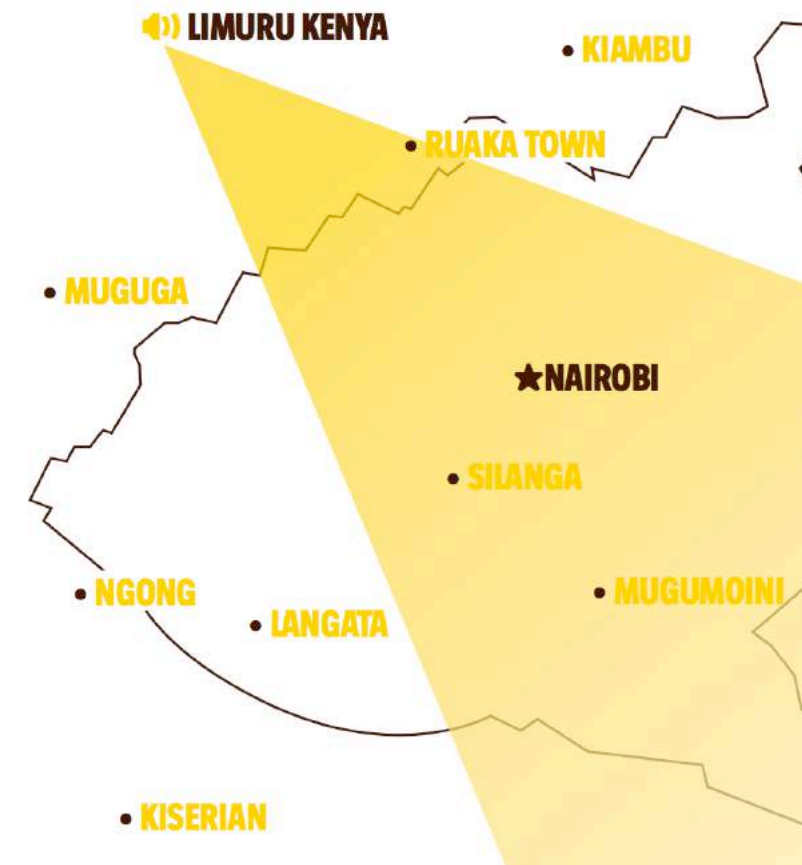
Ghetto Radio broadcasts for and by Kenyan youth from marginalized urban areas

Ghetto Radio 89.5 tells the story of urban African life and culture through interviews with artists and the people who live in Nairobi's poorest neighborhoods. Listeners identify with and trust presenters because they're from the same communities.

Radio programming is done by staff and volunteers who live in urban slums. On shows like "Changamka", hosts ask listeners to take actions for the community, like supporting the fight against gender-based assaults and police violence.



**GHETTO RADIO REACHES
YOUNGSTERS ALL OVER
THE WIDE NAIROBI AREA.**





“I describe my role at Ghetto Radio as a representative of the voiceless in society. The communities always appreciate what we do and it’s from their appreciation that we draw our passion and inspiration.

Garang Mzalendo,
Ghetto Radio Contributor



Ghetto Radio results

- Ghetto Radio programs regularly call on listeners to take real-world actions.
- Listeners take actions like reporting rogue police officers who commit extrajudicial executions and police brutality to the Independent Policing Oversight Authority.
- The flagship station in Nairobi has been on air since December 2007, and, according to independent media research by *Consumer Eye*, is the most popular radio station among the 15-25 year-old audience in Nairobi.



Action can be inspired by an organisation. But it's also set in motion by small groups of aligned individuals with a passion for change.



When people come together in a room, face-to-face, building relationships over time, they're more powerful.

Kristen Hodgson, Communications Director, Meetup

Women rely on one another to survive severe drought conditions

In Gujarat, India women farmers come together—five at a time—to find ways to combat a disastrous combination of severe draught and monsoon flooding.

They form teams that share resources, invest in a draught-resisting agricultural system called a bhungroo and commit to farming one another's land.

“Currently we are sharing water amongst ourselves,” said farmer Leelaban Lohana. “There are five members to a group. And we share the workload on each other's land. We have higher yields, and we don't have to hire day laborers so often.”





“

We were extremely poor and no one in the village respected us. They would not allow us to come into their home because they thought we would ask for money. Now, we are self-sufficient.

Shankuben Panchal,
Farmer



Bhungroo group results

- By forming small, dependent working groups, more than 18,000 women farmers manage flooding and drought conditions on their farmland.
- 100,000 family members now have food security thanks to this collective action model.
- Women farmers are freed from debt, gain land ownership and participate in local government as a result of their new expertise and influence in agriculture and land use.
- Taking a broader view, their work prevents desertification, helping to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Reflections on building community and common identity

1. How often do your supporters and volunteers meet one another face-to-face?
2. How would you describe your supporters' collective identity?
3. Is social contact and relationship building built-in to volunteer (and staff) programming?
4. If you could do one thing to build bonds between the people, including volunteers, in your organisation, what would it be?
5. What are ways you can help your volunteers see their work within a larger community context?

Acknowledgements

We're very grateful to all the organisations that agreed to be interviewed by this report's authors. We wish there was time and space to include ideas and quotes from every one of these orgs, but know that they all contributed. Everything useful herein arises from their insights and observations.

38 Degrees

AFL-CIO

All Out

Blue Envelope Project

ControlShift Labs

Dogwood Initiative

GetUp!

Ghetto Radio

Global Zero

Haiyya

Hollaback

Human Rights Campaign

The Humane League

Humane Society of the
United States

ILCP

Liberate Tate

Meetup

Naireeta Services

National Audubon Society

NationBuilder

NetSquared

Open Media

Project AWARE

SFU Public Square

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Glen Tarman

Jae Cameron

Carl Harris

Aprajita Pandey

Eli van der Giessen

Jon Camp

Crystal Henrickson

Leandro Ramos

Janet Webber

Maddy Carroll

Kristin Hodgson

David Ringer

Nathan Woodhull

Zack Deutsch-Gross

Samantha Lien

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Michael Silberman

Jack Fishman

Carol Misseldine

Ben Simon

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