

THE STORY OF THE COMMONS

The Commons Social Change Library exists to make social movements smarter and stronger.

The Commons is an online library for the change makers of the world and for those interested in social change, activism, advocacy and justice.

We support the power and effectiveness of progressive social change efforts by collecting campaigning best practice from Australia and around the world.

After earlier iterations of the library the Commons Social Change Library launched in its current form in April 2019.

Consultation with social movement stakeholders informed the design of the site and the broad array of content gathered.

The Commons quickly became the 'go-to portal' for people engaged in social change.

Since 2019 the Commons has grown significantly and our role has expanded.

In addition to maintaining the public online library the Commons team:

- Engages in rapid response resource development and curation to respond to crucial 'movement moments'.
- Shares social movement history to inspire and inform future action.
- Amplifies the impact of conferences by making resources available to a larger audience for the longer term.
- Provides customised services to organisations and networks engaged in social change activities.
- Develops and implements projects to address key needs.



The Commons pays respect to the Traditional Owners of the land in which we operate and wherever the Commons Library website is accessed. The Commons Library staff team live and work on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation and the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation.

THE COMMONS HAS...



1000+ resources to access



10 000+ visitor a week



700+ Contributors and 35+ Collections

The Commons Library is a unique and well loved source of information and empowerment.

It's like Google for activists! No other resource directory has the range of materials covering the breadth of approaches to social change. The librarians respond to the shifting needs of change makers, adding new resources every week. The site had 1.5 million page views in 5 years with countless ripples in social change impact.

All of this has been made possible by a small part time team on a modest budget.

WHO USES THE COMMONS?

Data from January-December 2023

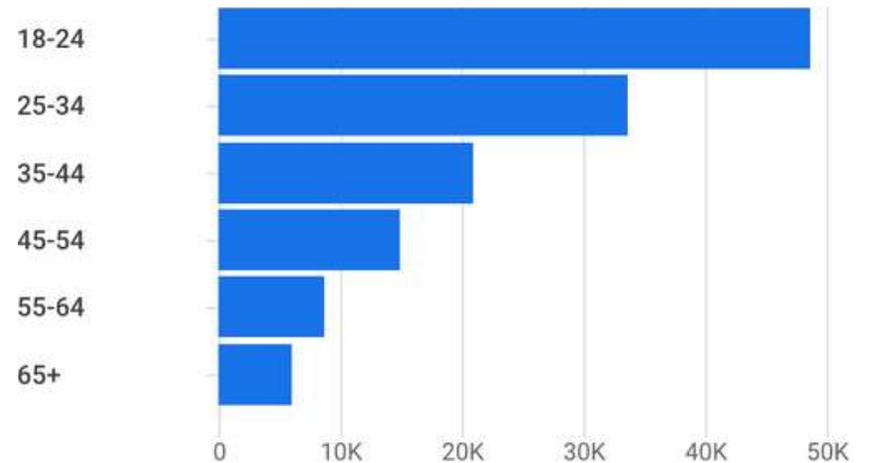
The Commons Library averages 10,000 visitors weekly from around the world. Our library hosts more than 1000 resources, which have been accessed over 1.5 million times.

Commons Library materials are used in many educational courses, provide orientation and training resources for countless organisations, and are being applied to hundreds of campaigns.

Users by Country



Users by Age



| COUNTRY | USERS |
|----------------|-------|
| United States | 109K |
| India | 87K |
| Australia | 62K |
| Philippines | 30K |
| United Kingdom | 30K |
| Pakistan | 21K |
| Canada | 19K |

FEEDBACK FROM LIBRARY USERS

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The Commons Library is a gift to the world. It's a contribution to support our learning, to make sure that we don't have to just keep repeating the same things, and we can notice advancements and shifts and changes.

I'm just delighted that the Commons Library exists, that it has been so carefully curated over the years, and that it continues to be a free resource for activists all over the globe.



Daniel Hunter

Global Training Lead
350.org

“

When I came across the Commons it really blew me away. I had never seen a resource centre that was alive where you can actually find things.

There are many different kinds of resource centres - there's the back of the closet where things accumulate, there's the filing cabinet you never go back to...

This is the opposite, a living resource centre: growing, adapting and thriving!



Marshall Ganz

Harvard Professor &
Organising Leader

“

The Commons Library reflects the liveliness and breadth of activism today, facilitating 24/7 sharing and building of knowledge and skills, which are crucial for social change transformation. As a degrowth activist scholar I identify the Commons Library is a convivial tool. Conviviality in this context means it's user friendly, transparent, durable, open access, continually updated, and inclusively produced to the benefit of all. The Commons Library is our springboard to an emancipatory future.



Anitra Nelson

Degrowth Activist Scholar
University of Melbourne

POPULAR RESOURCES

The Commons Social Change Library includes resources in many different formats, focused on a wide array of skills and approaches to social change.

The Commons librarians track engagement with our resources to identify areas of need. The resources that are popular at different times, and the search queries used, give fascinating insights into the ebbs and flows of social change.

The most popular Commons resource of all time is [Marshall Ganz Quotes and Wisdom about Leadership, Hope, Organizing and Narrative](#) reflecting the popularity of quotes, interest in organising, and the high profile of Marshall Ganz as a leading social change thinker.

[Disinformation and 7 Common Forms of Information Disorder](#) has received significant traffic over the last year, in part leading to a new Commons project on disinformation.

Bill Moyer's [Four Roles of Social Activism](#) is a perennial favourite, helping people understand tensions in movements and ways to improve collaboration.

Resources about [Campaign Strategy](#) are consistently popular, including the power mapping tool, leading us to develop an expanded guide, [Power and Power Mapping: Start Here](#).

Library users also prioritise resources that support effective work in groups, including [Facilitation Tools and Techniques](#).

Curated guides help people find paths through the library. You can access several via [New to Campaigning & Organising? Start Here](#).



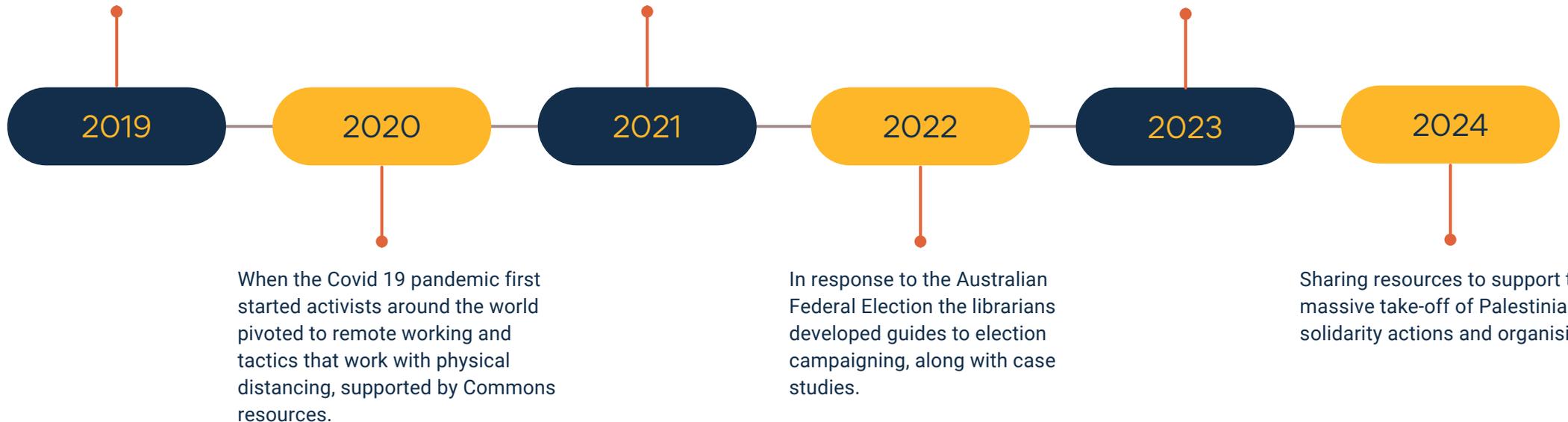
RESPONDING IN CRUCIAL MOMENTS

A social change library needs to keep pace with the ups and downs of social movements, responding to needs as they arise. Here is a snapshot of our rapid response work over the years.

With School Strikes for Climate attracting huge crowds the Commons produced a history of school strikes and walk-outs, connecting climate action with strikes for peace and student rights.

The librarians curated resources to support the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements.

In response to concerted attacks the Trans Justice Project produced crucial resources to analyse the anti-trans movement and guide allies in how to support trans people, finding a large audience through the Commons.



COLLECTIONS

The Commons Social Change Library includes 36 collections contributed by civil society and capacity building partners.

Like any good library the Commons gathers materials from many different sources, making them available in one central accessible place. The collections provide solid building blocks of content which are supplemented by hundreds of individual contributors.

The Commons Library includes pre-existing resource collections which may already have a home on other websites as well as new collections that the Commons Librarians have worked with organisations to build from scratch. Some networks have chosen to add collections to the Commons rather than building their own websites, making use of our user-friendly structure and search capacity and established high traffic to connect with their audiences.

The Commons also preserves materials from projects that are no longer active, making the wisdom they have generated available for the long term.

Many collections come from Australian organisations but there are also collections with an international focus and contributors from all around the world.

View the full list of collections on the Commons Library [Browse page](#).



FEEDBACK FROM LIBRARY USERS

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I'm delighted to be congratulating the Commons Social Change Library on five years of its amazing work. Before the Commons existed, I often reflected in frustration that there was so much collective knowledge in the sector held by campaigners and organisers with lots of experience, but very few people had the time to document or share that information, and no easy way for people to find that. The Commons Library changed all that.



Anita Tang

**Community Organising Director
Australian Progress**

“

The wealth of information and diverse perspectives the Commons Social Change Library has is remarkable. It's a pocket of liberation in a world that doesn't feel as liberated as it should. It's a space where activists and organisations can come together to find inspiration to connect and learn through knowledge and people from all around the world. It's like this reciprocally existing community led ecosystem that is just thriving.



Mohini Govender

**Knowledge Curator
YouthxYouth**

“

I can't overstate how useful and important the Commons is when it comes to building the capacity of those of us fighting for a just world.

From comprehensive resources to expert advice, the Commons is making an enormous impact, and is my go-to recommendation to anyone needing help, resources or inspiration for their next campaign.



Justin Whelan

**Senior Campaign Manager
RE-Alliance**

5 YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

1 Organising Models Mapping Project



In partnership with Australian Progress the Commons undertook research into how organising is happening in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. We gathered insights from 24 organisations working on a range of issues and at different scales. You can read the research findings: [Organising Models Mapping Project](#).

Thanks to ACF, 350, FYA, TWS, Amnesty International & Action Aid.

2 Making Advocacy Accessible



The participation of people with disability makes groups, campaigns and movements stronger! The MAA project includes an educational webinar; translating resources into Easy Read so everyone can understand; guides to improving accessibility; and stories of campaigns led by people with disability. Visit the [Making Advocacy Accessible](#) collection.

Thanks to State Trustees Victoria.

3 Commons Library Skills Sessions



The Commons team presented a series of free training sessions on the skills we have developed running the library: writing book reviews, making infographics, conducting interviews, researching case studies and more. See the [Skills Sessions articles and recordings](#).

Thanks to the John T Reid Charitable Trusts for making this series possible.

5 YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

4 Movement Monitor



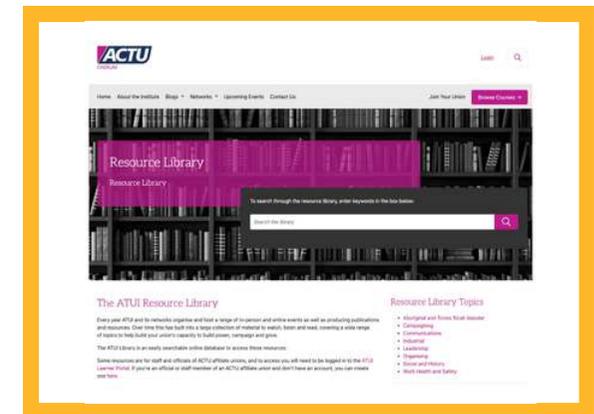
The [Movement Monitor project](#) is developing a comprehensive movement measurement methodology and applying it to the Australian climate movement. The project is run by researchers at the Commons Library with input from academics, international movement experts, and many stakeholders in the Australian climate movement. Thanks to the Sunrise Project and Boundless.Earth.

5 LCN Resource Center



In 2021 the Leading Change Network LCN needed a professional platform for community organisers to find resources. Impressed with the way the Commons was set up LCN engaged the Commons to design and develop a Resource Center. The new Resource Center was launched in 2022 and the Commons librarians continue to provide ongoing support to the team at LCN. Visit the [LCN Resource Center](#).

6 ATUI Library



With many diverse resources in many different places the Australian Trade Union Institute ATUI recognised the need to provide a simple, easy to use platform for their members to access resources. In 2023 ATUI engaged the Commons to set up a [library](#) with a similar structure to the Commons. As part of this work the Commons also helped set up the [Australian Workers Film Guide](#) to be a searchable database.

5 YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

7 COF Resource Update



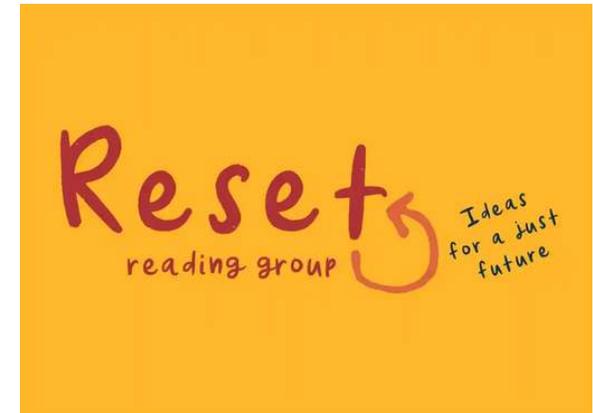
The Community Organising Fellowship (COF) trains and mentors a network of community organisers and campaigners in Australia. COF recognised the need to update and improve their collection of training resources for the next round of intense 6 month training in 2022. The Commons librarians used their knowledge and experience as librarians and training facilitators to update and create a [new collection of resources](#) for new and future fellows.

8 RACP Advocacy Course



In 2021 the Commons developed an online advocacy course and training sessions for the Royal Australasia College of Physicians RACP. The Physician Advocacy Resource covers the skills and competencies that enable physicians to advocate on important health issues. It covers examples of successful advocacy, government and parliamentary processes, policy and media, stakeholder analysis and framing messages.

9 Reset Reading Group



In 2020, as the world reeled from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Commons convened the Reset Reading Group. Every fortnight for three months progressive thinkers provided materials (articles, podcasts, films etc) for reflection, discussion, and potential action on key themes central to a just future. Several groups formed and met online, as well as collective sessions and conference presentations. Visit the [Reset collection](#).

COMMONS CONVERSATIONS

Commons Conversations is a summer series of interviews in which campaigners shared their experiences and insights into activism, learning in movements, radical history and more.

Each season is broadcast by Community Radio 3CR. You can [listen to each episode](#) on the Commons Library or via podcast platforms.



Series 1

- Insights from Disability Campaigning with Elly Desmarchelier and El Gibbs
- Insights into First Nations Activism with Millie Telford and Grace Vegesana
- Insights into Learning in Movements with Laurence Cox
- Lessons from AIDS Activism with Sarah Schulman
- Insights into Communities and Climate Change with Maddy Rose Braddon
- Insights into the Stolen Wages Campaign with Geraldine Fela
- Insights into Values, Difference and Campaigning with Te Raukura O'Connell Rapira and Holly Hammond

Series 2

- Movement Success, Durability and Research with Professor Winnifred Louis
- Insights from Disability Campaigning with Rochelle Porteous
- Women and Leadership in the Environment Movement with Judy Lambert and Victoria McKenzie-McHarg
- Building Coalitions and Campaigns to Protect Forests with Jess Beckerling
- Emerging AI Technologies and Campaigning with Hannah O'Rourke
- Citizen Science and Big Tree Hunting with Alice Hardinge
- AI, Technology and Social Transformation with Ned Howey
- Insights into Environmental Justice Movements in India with Radhika Jhaveri

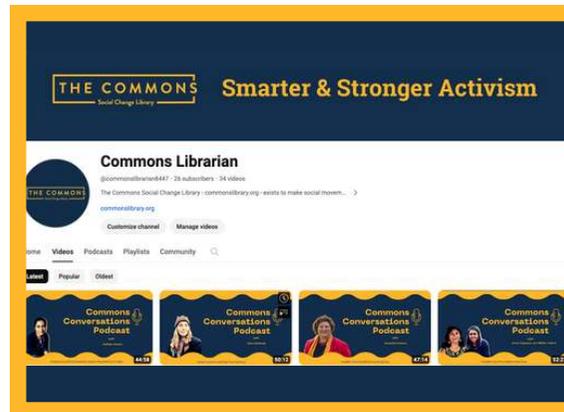
PLANS FOR 2024/25

1 Guest Curators



The Commons Library contains 1000+ resources from social movements around the world. The librarians strive to gather content from diverse authors but recognise that power and privilege shape the stories that are told and the voices that are heard. The new guest curator program will support and fund content creation and curation from communities of colour.

2 Bite Sized Content



As the world speeds up and people experience information overload, the Commons is working to make crucial educational resources accessible in different ways.

We are in a period of learning and experimentation to see what formats and content resonates, including trialling short videos and email courses.

3 Countering Disinformation



The widespread dissemination of dis/misinformation by far-right groups and conspiracists is a major challenge. Civil society is on the backfoot, needing to act to protect targeted communities and progressive reforms.

With support from Humanists Victoria the Commons will produce guides for young people and civil society.

SECURE THE FUTURE OF THE COMMONS

1 Recurrent Core Funding



The Commons Library is a progressive institution for the longterm. Funding support for the core work of the Commons is crucial - so we can keep doing our part to make activism smarter and stronger.

Contribute to the Commons [core funding appeal](#) on the Australian Communities Foundation platform or make a [direct donation](#).

2 Organisational Supporters



Does your organisation access resources on the Commons Library? Do you value our shared learning platform featuring innovation and insights from many movements around the world?

We invite you to become [organisational supporters](#) to sustain the Commons for the long term. Supporters have access to services from the Commons librarians, tailored to the needs of your team.

3 Commons Community



We ask individuals who use and value the Commons Library to commit to a monthly donation. Your support gives the Commons a stable base for the long term and enables our rapid response work, producing crucial resources at times of crisis and opportunity. Members of the [Commons Community](#) receive a special quarterly newsletter full of ideas and inspiration, and have priority access to advice sessions with the librarians.

THE COMMONS

Social Change Library

For more information, including
staff and board profiles, see:
[Annual Report 2022/23](#)
and
<https://commonslibrary.org/about/>

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