UNDERSTANDING POWER-BUILDING ECOSYSTEMS

CASE STUDIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND POWER-BUILDING THROUGH BALLOT INITIATIVES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Civic engagement is important for healthy democracies and healthy communities. For communities that have been historically excluded from political processes, building power can be particularly transformative. Examining ballot initiative organizing ecosystems helps to illuminate insights that can support civic engagement and power-building. This study offers an analysis of the conditions and strategies that can both help and hinder power-building, based on three ballot initiative issues that each have the potential to improve community health outcomes:

- Affordable Housing
- Medicaid Expansion
- Criminal Justice Reform

Political activity, and civic engagement in particular, is seen as an important social determinant of health. However, studies have shown mixed results when examining how civic engagement affects health outcomes. Most relevant here is the work that suggests that social capital—the extent to which individuals are connected to others—has a positive impact on health outcomes. One hypothesis is that civic engagement has the potential to spur social capital, which is associated with better health.

Research on ballot measures tends to focus narrowly on civic engagement as voting and political knowledge. There is a rich tradition of scholarship on social movements, but this body of research often focuses on activation and mobilization that relies at least in part on non-traditional politics, such as civil disobedience. **More recently, scholars have begun to explore how civic engagement around ballot initiatives can build power and be a catalyst for transformational organizing.** We build on their work to deepen our collective understanding of the strategies, contexts, and connections that shape civic engagement and power-building.

The objectives of this project are to understand and map the layers and levels of support for ballot-centered power-building ecosystems and to help philanthropy gain a clear picture of how ballot initiatives drive community members to get involved in civic engagement. By focusing on power-building ecosystems that underpin ballot-oriented civic engagement, with a particular focus on low-income constituents, women, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, we help to round out our understandings of the roles of race, class, and gender in building power.

With this goal, we let the following questions guide our research:

ONE
What role do ballot initiatives play in building power and driving local, multi-faceted civic engagement activities that develop leaders and galvanize voters, especially women, low-income constituents, and BIPOC communities?

TWO
What do the maps of power-building ecosystems look like? What are their dynamics and how does this shape power-building?

THREE
What contextual factors constrain or enable ballot-centered civic engagement and power-building?

METHODS

To answer these questions, we examined six ballot initiative campaigns as case studies. We deliberately chose places with points of convergence and divergence with regards to demographics, historical and socio-cultural context, politics, and organizing infrastructure to examine the varied paths to power-building. We focused on three distinct issues in three unique regional sites: criminal justice reform in the South: Florida and Louisiana; affordable housing in the West: Portland, Oregon and Oakland, California; and Medicaid expansion in the Great Plains Region: Montana and Nebraska. All of the campaigns took place during the 2018 midterm elections.

In an effort to better understand how and under what conditions ballot initiative campaigns build power, we reviewed the literature and conducted interviews with organizers, elected officials, community members who were activated through the campaigns, consultants, and funders. Once we had identified the main themes, we returned to key respondents and advisors to confirm that our analysis and recommendations are aligned.

FINDINGS

Ballot initiatives can be a tool for power-building.

Ballot initiatives can be used as a tool to build power or signal how much power organizations have, when situated within a thoughtful long-term strategy. In this study, our metrics to measure power included whether campaigns activated new people, expanded the electorate, facilitated new organizing relationships, established new relationships with funders, attracted new audiences, shifted who holds decision-making power, adopted new frameworks to explain issues, employed new organizing strategies or tactics, brought civic engagement knowledge and skills to new groups, or respected community knowledge, autonomy, and accountability.

Campaigns that centered people who were directly impacted built more power.

Louisiana and Florida's campaigns to require unanimous jury verdicts and re-enfranchise people with prior felony convictions were led by people directly impacted by the issues. Their leadership ensured that others closest to the issues were also centered; subsequently, they built more power and had the most monumental wins.

Political conditions and ecosystems inform campaign structure and outcomes.

The campaigns we focused on grew out of different sets of conditions and organizing ecosystems, ranging from weak to robust, with a variety of demographics, ballot initiative laws and requirements, and types of infrastructure. Each of these characteristics informed campaign strategies, tactics, challenges, and opportunities, and influenced how civic engagement unfolded.

Prioritizing short-term wins over transformative change weakens power.

Organizers in almost every state shared frustrations with funders and consultants' desire to win specific campaigns overshadowing long-term goals. We often heard stories about decision-makers perpetuating harmful narratives and justifying their choices behind the rhetoric that it was necessary to win. The call to prioritize long-term goals that ensure that everyone is treated with dignity and respect rang out across state lines.

Outside consultants often amplify power imbalances and create challenging organizing conditions.

Issues with outside consultants was the third-most common challenge that respondents raised. Local organizers described how they were underestimated and overlooked by out-of-state consultants, and many people advocated for hiring locally for campaigns since residents are more likely to be invested in the issues and keep resources and knowledge in their communities.

Effective organizing strategies include an intersectional analysis.

Race played an important role in many of these campaigns, either as an explicit part of the strategy or as a blind spot that led to fractures and missteps along the way. Black women carried the work in many places and developed powerful, innovative strategies. Race was also central to decisions about messaging—either in framing the issue as being about racial justice or combatting white supremacy, or being purposefully left out or minimized in colorblind narratives meant to appeal to white voters. Racism among communities and consultant leadership was a challenge organizers faced in most states, while multi-racial leadership helped to broaden the spectrum of support.

Ballot initiative campaigns generally have short timelines that require fast action.

Lack of time was an issue in every state, even Louisiana where the fight to repeal the non-unanimous jury law has been underway for decades. Many of the case studies we share here consisted of long fights that culminated in short, rushed campaigns due to late approvals from the legislature; time-consuming, expensive qualification processes; and funders being slow to invest in civic engagement work.

Tailored micro-targeting can be more effective than blanket messaging that appeals to white swing voters.

Many of the campaigns tailored their messaging and used micro-targeting to appeal to different populations. Our case studies demonstrate how taking this approach can be more effective than putting out messaging that appeals only to white swing voters, both in terms of building power and winning campaigns.

Reaching beyond likely allies helps win campaigns.

The criminal justice reform campaigns in the South made connections with unlikely allies and thus were able to reach a broader audience. Conversely, Oregon and Montana's campaigns largely failed to form alliances with BIPOC organizations and thus created less community power.

This research offers both an overview of the landscape as well as a systematic analysis of activities that inspire communities to become civically engaged. Our approach centers power-building efforts, which have significant implications for health outcomes. Civic engagement, stable housing, access to healthcare, the right to vote, and freedom from incarceration are all important social determinants of health. As such, each case study offers an investigation into the nexus of two social dimensions of health. Power-building ecosystems, as well as the strategies and tactics used in ballot initiatives campaigns, offer a unique lens through which to examine civic engagement. Ballot initiatives are also of interest because they can reveal which issues are most salient for community members, what conditions facilitate ongoing civic engagement, and how to develop new community leaders.

To fully understand how and why communities choose to pursue social change through ballot initiatives, we must understand the ecosystems where the ballot initiatives develop.

Scholars have begun to explore how civic engagement around ballot initiatives can build power and be a catalyst for transformational organizing.

ALEXIS ANDERSON-REED

The mobilization efforts required to land a measure on the ballot and then win at the ballot can move community members from disempowerment and inaction to empowerment and long-term community engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Civic engagement is a cornerstone of both a healthy democracy and healthy communities. For communities that are currently or have been historically disenfranchised, underserved, or oppressed, building power is vital for civic engagement and positive health outcomes. **Mapping the landscapes and tracing the dynamics of power-building ecosystems of ballot initiatives[1] leads to sharper insights that can support civic engagement and build power.** This study offers analysis of the conditions and strategies that enhance or stymie power-building around three ballot initiative issues, each of which has the potential to improve community health outcomes:

- Affordable Housing
- Medicaid Expansion
- Criminal Justice Reform

This study addresses an interrelated set of questions:

FIRST

What role do ballot initiatives play in building power and driving local, multi-faceted civic engagement activities that develop leaders and galvanize voters, especially women, low-income constituents, and BIPOC communities?

SECOND

What do the maps of power-building ecosystems look like, what are their dynamics, and how do they shape power-building?

THIRD

What contextual factors constrain or enable power-building and ballot-centered civic engagement?

[1] In this report, we use the term "ballot initiative" broadly to include measures, initiatives, propositions, or constitutional amendments that are placed on the ballot through citizen petitions or legislative referrals.

To provide a clear picture of how the power-building ecosystems supporting ballot initiatives drive community members to become civically engaged, we examined six cases. We analyzed two referred local ballot measures addressing affordable housing in the West: Oakland, California and Portland, Oregon; two Medicaid expansion ballot initiatives in the Great Plains region: Montana and Nebraska; and two criminal justice reform, state constitutional amendments in the South; Florida and Louisiana. By examining power-building efforts through an "issues" lens, we were able to trace the unique ecosystem supporting the ballot initiative, unearth the process of building an electoral effort around a social issue, and unpack how people, place, history, and ideas come together to create social change.

Each pair of case studies offers key insights into the potential for building power and increasing civic engagement. Oakland and Portland both offer a lens into liberal cities in which local government or elected officials referred affordable housing measures to voters. In each case, we observe a professionalization of the process; self-proclaimed "policy wonks" or experts from advocacy organizations and paid political consultants led the charge in pushing these ballot measures. Their connections to city leaders allowed the measures to bypass the signature collection needed for citizen-referred measures. While this provided more time for the campaign—an issue for other cases in this study—it bypassed the step of signature collection, which typically facilitates power-building and fosters civic engagement among new groups. In Portland, an additional key lesson revolved around catering messaging to likely white swing voters, and in the process alienating and turning off organizations working in BIPOC communities. **A lesson in cities with a reliable left-leaning electorate, less work is necessary to get out the vote for progressive measures, and as a result, power-building through these measures did not occur.** Five of the six campaigns were successful in passing the initiatives. Only Montana's Initiative 185 failed at the ballot, which gave us useful data to compare and assess power-building in states with different electoral outcomes.

In Nebraska and Montana, we observed moderate increases in power-building and civic engagement. In both states, Medicaid expansion was an issue that had been attempted through the legislature. While Montana's existing Medicaid policy was set to sunset, Nebraska had repeatedly failed to pass Medicaid expansion through its unicameral legislature. A key lesson from Nebraska includes the importance of tailoring strategies for rural communities by relying on trusted messengers and small, local media outlets. Nebraska's win can also be attributed to its unique power-building ecosystem; the relative abundance of local philanthropic dollars—coupled with the strong leadership of one advocacy organization in particular—facilitated the passage of the ballot initiative.

Another key insight from Nebraska is that the ballot initiative process can be a useful tool when legislators are out of step with their constituents on an issue. In Montana, two key lessons included the dangers of having a strong opponent—in their case tobacco companies—and the importance of understanding the nuances of how legislation can impact marginalized groups, such as Native communities. Other insights from these campaigns include the need for earlier investments—and therefore longer timeframes to build the campaigns—and to resource local organizers rather than outside consultants who often diminish the possibilities for power-building.

The greatest levels of new civic engagement and power-building occurred in Florida and Louisiana. In both states, directly impacted individuals initiated the movements for criminal justice reform years, if not decades, prior to the amendment campaigns. Directly impacted individuals and Black and Brown women were the leaders, organizers, and strategists behind the successful campaigns. Their leadership proved essential to galvanize directly impacted communities, particularly BIPOC communities, through innovative approaches to organizing and tailored messaging. **Key lessons from these states underscore the importance of addressing the racist roots and contemporary racial inequities of criminal justice policies head-on in order to engage Black voters and other voters of color.** Another key insight is to trust directly impacted leaders and organizers in their ability to move individuals and communities from being infrequent or unlikely voters to the polls. Both states required bipartisan approval, so understanding the unique ways to frame the issues in ways that appealed to a cross-section of voters was paramount. Last, like other states, outside consultants proved to be a challenge to campaigns and early investment would have eased some of the complications of launching and running statewide campaigns.
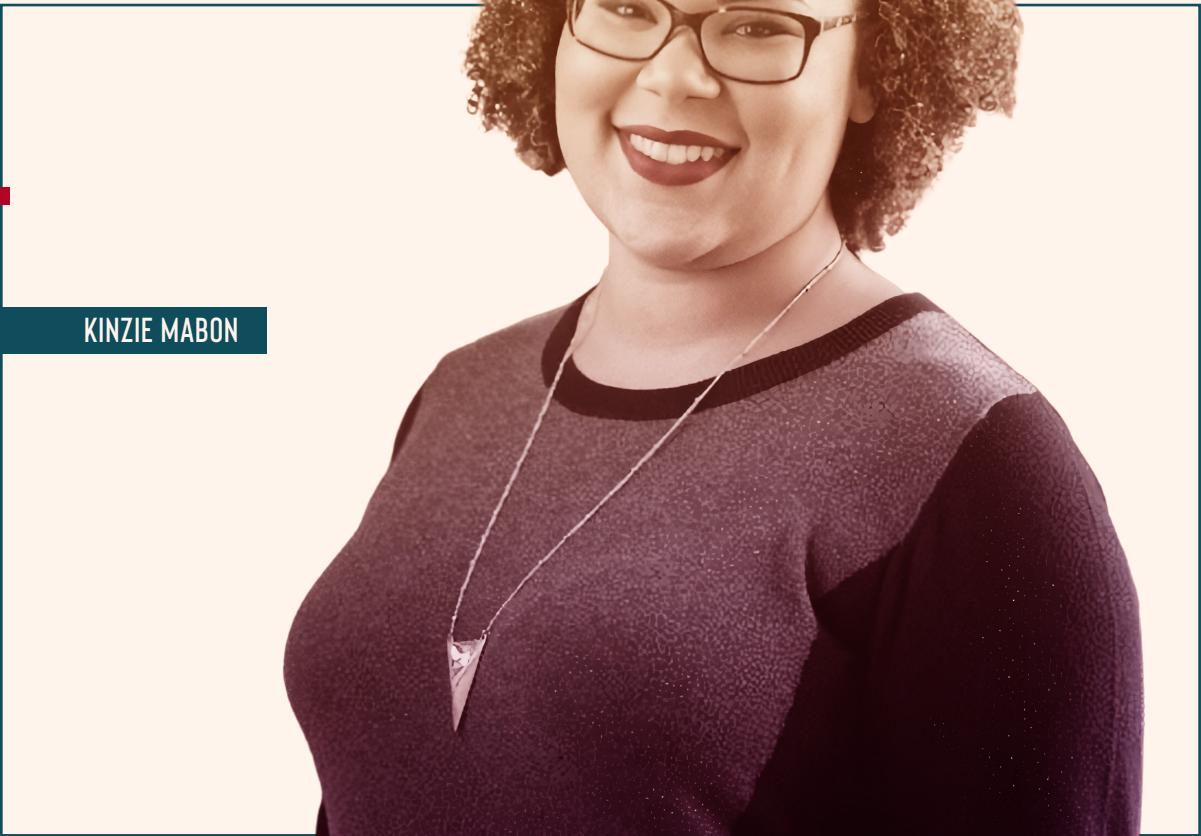
Power-Building, Civic Engagement, and Ballot Initiatives

Research on ballot measures tends to focus on civic engagement defined narrowly as voting and political knowledge. A study on the relationship between ballot initiatives and political knowledge found that voters from states that use ballot initiatives see an increase in political knowledge over time [1]. In addition to increasing an individual's political knowledge, another study demonstrated that referendums increased voter attention to media and politics, and to a limited extent, improved a sense of political efficacy [2]. Additional research demonstrates that direct democracy, especially ballot measures, increases voter turnout in both midterm and presidential elections [3]. A study focusing on reaching voters through messaging determined that the receptivity of public opinion, access to media and financial resources, and the availability of credible spokespersons were three important factors that shape decisions about framing a ballot initiative issue [4]. More recently, researchers have begun to explore the transformational organizing that can occur through ballot measure campaigns and yield long-lasting civic engagement [5]–[7], and this study builds on their work.

To be sure, there is a rich tradition of scholarship on mass mobilization and transformational organizing that is rooted in examining the networks, strategies, tactics, and culture of civic and advocacy organizations [8] as well as social movements [9]. This body of research, however, tends to focus on activation and mobilization that relies at least in part on non-traditional politics, for example protests or civil disobedience, or is not directly connected to electoral politics.

By studying the power-building ecosystems that underpin ballot-oriented civic engagement, especially in low-income and BIPOC communities, we bridge the gap in understanding civic engagement as conceived by social movement scholarship and studies of ballot initiatives and direct democracy. **We define civic engagement as participation in the politics of space or place.** This can include involvement in traditional politics (i.e., engaging mainstream political institutions such as voting) or nontraditional politics (i.e., using alternatives to mainstream institutions such as boycotts, protests, or sit-ins), participation in civic organizations, and volunteering. **We conceptualize organizing as the process by which people come together to take action around an idea, issue, or campaign; organizing, then, facilitates civic engagement.**

KINZIE MABON

Studies suggest that social capital, the extent to which individuals are connected to others, has a positive impact on health outcomes. It is posited that civic engagement has the potential to spur social capital, the crucial link for understanding the relationship between health and civic engagement

Connecting Civic Engagement to Health

This study into civic engagement and power-building ecosystems unfolded as COVID-19 laid bare the deep interconnections between health and race, class, citizenship status, among other social inequities. While health outcomes are in part a result of individual-level factors, the importance of social determinants of health cannot be overstated. We know that healthy communities thrive when a holistic approach to wellness is available, including access to medical care, mental health care, affordable housing, economic opportunities, freedom from violence, quality education, among other factors. The pandemic made apparent the many failings of the United States healthcare system, as well as the deep social and economic inequities faced by BIPOC, immigrant, rural, and poor communities.

We privilege an approach that centers the power-building ecosystem as the level of analysis. **This research offers both an overview of the landscape as well as a systematic analysis of activities that inspire communities to become civically engaged.** To execute this analysis, we center three important issue areas: affordable housing, Medicaid expansion, and criminal justice reform. While our approach centers the power-building efforts, they have significant implications for health outcomes. **Civic engagement, stable housing, access to health care, and freedom from incarceration are each important social determinants of health.** As such, each case study offers an investigation into the nexus of two social dimensions of health.

Civic engagement has been studied as an important social determinant for community health. Studies, however, have shown mixed outcomes as to whether civic engagement has positive, negative or neutral effects on health outcomes [10]. **Studies suggest that social capital, the extent to which individuals are connected to others, has a positive impact on health outcomes. It is posited that civic engagement has the potential to spur social capital, the crucial link for understanding the relationship between health and civic engagement [11].** Research shows that engagement in electoral politics can positively correlate to individual-level health outcomes. For example, a quantitative study of 44 countries demonstrated that individuals who voted and participated in voluntary organizations reported having better

health outcomes than those who did not [12]. Further, a study of individuals who abstained from voting established that they self-reported lower levels of health [13]. Similarly, research based in Kansas found that groups that were the least politically engaged also experienced lower levels of overall health [14]. In addition to these individual-level outcomes, civic engagement around ballot measures, initiatives, and referenda has the potential to impact structural and cultural outcomes that also contribute to community health.

The three issue areas also have significant impacts on health outcomes. Perhaps least surprisingly, access to health care is associated with better health outcomes [15], [16]. Medicaid expansion specifically has been shown to significantly reduce mortality rates, by as much as 6.1% [17]. Housing is one of the best researched social determinants of health. An overview of the literature suggests four pathways exist connecting stable housing with positive health outcomes: stable housing, the quality and safety of housing, the affordability of housing, and the neighborhood or environmental characteristics [18]. Finally, increasing attention is being given to incarceration as a social determinant of health in the U.S. [19]. Focusing on Black men, Nowotny and Kuptsevych-Timmer argue that incarceration ought to be understood as a social determinant of health with deleterious effects for those incarcerated as well as their families and communities due to cascading effects [20]. Organizing to pass laws that would improve these issues has the potential to improve community health outcomes across the six case study sites.

The Importance of Organizing Ecosystems

The ecosystem of organizations, consultants, funders, community leaders, and organizers coupled with the strategies and tactics of community organizing and voter mobilization that undergird ballot initiatives offer an unique lens through which to examine a broader conception of civic engagement. Direct democracy through ballot initiatives can illuminate which issues are most salient, the conditions that best encourage long-term civic engagement, and the optimal strategies for inspiring or inviting in politically engaged community members. This is especially true when these efforts are led by local residents or directly impacted communities. However, even when introduced by advocacy organizations or policy experts, **the mobilization efforts required to land a measure on the ballot and then win at the ballot can move community members from disempowerment and inaction to empowerment and long-term community engagement.** To fully understand how and why communities choose to pursue social change through ballot initiatives, it is imperative to understand the ecosystems in which they develop.

The mobilization efforts required to land a measure on the ballot and then win at the ballot can move community members from disempowerment and inaction to empowerment and long-term community engagement.

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

This study was designed as a comparison of six cases of organizing ecosystems to understand how and under what conditions they build power. We deliberately chose cases with points of convergence and divergence with regards to demographics, historical and socio-cultural context, politics, and organizing infrastructure to examine the varied paths to power-building. We focused on three distinct issues in three unique regional sites: criminal justice reform in the South: Florida and Louisiana; affordable housing in the West: Portland, Oregon and Oakland, California; and Medicaid expansion in the Great Plains Region: Montana and Nebraska. Each of the six ballot initiatives, measures, or amendments took place during the 2018 midterm elections. Five campaigns were successful in passing the initiatives (Amendment 2 now requires unanimous jury verdicts for felony trials in Louisiana; Amendment 4 re-enfranchised people with prior felony convictions in Florida; Measure Y closed a just cause eviction loophole in Oakland; Measure 26–199 passed an affordable housing bond in Portland; and Initiative 427 expanded access to Medicaid in Nebraska) and one failed at the ballot (Initiative 185 sought to extend Medicaid expansion and raise the tobacco tax in Montana).

We approached our research questions using a case study design because of its strength in tracing processes and mechanisms, and unpacking the "whys" and "hows" questions [21], [22]. The six cases selected for this study are the coordinated efforts to pass a ballot initiative, measure, or amendment by the power-building ecosystems in each of the six locations. We define power-building ecosystems as the network of individuals, organizations, communities, and coalitions that comprised the activation around a particular ballot initiative, measure, or amendment. A power-building ecosystem is generally unique to a location (though it may contain national or out-of-state partners) as well as unique to an issue area (e.g., though there may be overlapping actors and organizations, an affordable housing organizing ecosystem will be different from a criminal justice reform organizing ecosystem, even in the same location).

We used in-depth semi-structured interviews as the primary data sources for our six cases. In addition, we collected campaign materials and organizational documents related to the issues and campaigns, including websites, fliers and mailers, opinion editorials, advertisements, and news clips.

CASE SELECTIONS

Cases were selected solely from the 2018 midterm elections in order to limit variability of national context. Midterm elections are especially advantageous for studying civic engagement precisely because fewer voters cast ballots in midterms as compared to general election years. As such, organizing ecosystems that engage in electoral work are likely to deploy a wider array and more creative set of strategies during midterm election cycles. 2018 saw the highest voter turnout in midterm elections in over a century [23] (largely attributed to the Trump administration), making these cases particularly ripe for analysis.

To understand how variation in organizing ecosystems shapes power-building, we varied our cases on several dimensions:

BALLOT INITIATIVE ISSUES

Each of the three issue areas—criminal justice reform, affordable housing, and Medicaid expansion—contributes to improving community-level health outcomes. They also impact, and likely draw support from, different constituents or bases. Scholars have argued that incarceration is an important social determinant of health, especially for Black people in the U.S. [20]. Criminal justice reform disproportionately impacts communities of color and especially Black communities. Housing has long been viewed as a key social determinant of health, and stable housing is known to be an important component for positive health outcomes. Those most vulnerable to unstable housing are the poor, working-poor and working-class, and in the context of this study, reside in expensive mid-sized cities facing high rates of gentrification. Medicaid expansion is perhaps the most obvious in directly impacting individuals' health outcomes by providing them access to health insurance.

CAMPAIGN SUCCESS

Both winning and losing campaigns shed light on the different lessons learned by organizing ecosystems in their efforts to improve communities and build power. Campaigns in Oakland, CA; Portland, OR; Florida; Louisiana; and Nebraska were all successful. The ballot initiative campaign in Montana failed, but Medicaid expansion later passed through the state legislature in 2019.

REGION

Regional variation underscores the unique contexts and concerns around civic engagement of the six cases. Two ballot measures took place in the West (Portland and Oakland), two in the Great Plains Region (Montana and Nebraska), and two in the South (Florida and Louisiana). In the West, the municipal ballot measures focused solely on city voters. In Nebraska and Montana, statewide organizing efforts were particularly concerned with urban and rural differences. In Florida and Louisiana, statewide initiatives required organizing across the state. With regards to similarities, five of the six campaigns were anchored in mid-sized cities (Lincoln, NE; Miami, FL; New Orleans, LA; and Oakland, CA), which typically receive less attention from scholars and funders alike, regarding organizing activities and infrastructure as compared to large, well-resourced, and over-studied cities like New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles. One ballot measure was centered in a smaller large city (Portland, OR), but shares many of the features of the mid-sized cities with respect to attention to organizing.

POLITICS

We chose cases with varying political leanings. Oakland and Portland vote solidly Democratic. Louisiana, Montana, and Nebraska lean Republican at the state level, and Florida is considered a "swing" state since voters' support for Republicans and Democrats fluctuates [24]. The anchor cities mostly lean Democratic, with the exception of Billings, MT and Lincoln, NE, where voters have traditionally supported Republican candidates but are now leaning more liberal [24]. While all of the issues are traditionally considered progressive, the ballot initiatives enjoyed bipartisan support from voters in both purple and red states.

RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS

We selected cases with demographic variation along ethnic and racial lines pertaining to anchor cities' and statewide populations, and who was most directly impacted by the proposed legislation and who was targeted for civic engagement. Generally, Oakland and Miami represented the most diverse cities, with significant representation of various racial and ethnic groups and with non-Hispanic whites in the minority [25], [26]. New Orleans is a majority Black city, with non-Hispanic whites comprising the second-largest racial group [27]. Portland, Billings, and Lincoln are overwhelmingly white cities, with small percentages of Black, Hispanic, and immigrant populations [28]–[30]. Though Indigenous populations comprise only about 6% of the population in Montana, these communities were integral to Medicaid expansion efforts in 2018 [31].

CAMPAIGN LEADERSHIP

We chose ballot initiatives in which the campaigns were led by different members of power-building ecosystems. Advocacy organizations led the charge in Montana, Nebraska, and Oakland, CA. Elected officials and housing policymakers were essential in leading the ballot measures in Oakland and Portland. Grassroots nonprofit organizations comprised of and led by directly impacted individuals pioneered the work in Louisiana and Florida. In addition, Black women were central to campaign operations in Florida and Louisiana.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

While the social, cultural and historical features of each case study site are varied and deep, those that are most relevant to the ballot issues are the following: the history of housing discrimination and contemporary dynamics of race, racism, and gentrification in Oakland and Portland; the history of slavery and Jim Crow and current impacts of mass incarceration in Florida and Louisiana, as well as immigration and its resulting diversity in Florida; and the role of farming and rural life in Montana and Nebraska, as well as new waves of immigration to Nebraska and the importance of Native sovereignty and culture in Montana.

² While Montana has leaned Republican for some time, respondents shared that in 2018 it felt more like a swing state than it does now with more and more voters supporting Republican candidates.

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MEASURING POWER-BUILDING

Building on the work of the Lead Local Project and the Praxis Project, we understand power-building to be a multi-faceted, dynamic process that has different textures depending on the context [32] and is rooted in community agency, accountability, and solidarity [33]. Traditional ways of measuring power-building based on a snapshot in time are insufficient to capture the many dimensions of building power. **In the context of this research, we see ballot initiative campaigns as important for the policies they change as well as the seeds they plant that continue to grow long after the last ballot has been cast.**

Similar to Speer et al. (2020), we set out to measure power-building based on both its outcomes and its processes [34]. Table 1 provides an overview of our metrics. First, we considered whether ballot initiative campaigns activated new people; galvanized new voter participation; created new organizations, networks, coalitions, or organizing relationships; established new relationships with funders; attracted new audiences to the issue; or shifted who had decision-making power and leadership in the ecosystem. We also looked at procedural metrics, such as whether campaigns adopted new frameworks to explain the issue; employed new organizing models, strategies, or tactics; brought civic engagement knowledge or skills to new groups; and whether they respected community knowledge, autonomy, and accountability.

Table 1-A: Measuring Power-Building

METRIC	TYPE OF DATA	EXAMPLE
OUTCOMES		
Newly activated individuals	QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE	Description of people who were moved to become active in campaigns for the first time
New voters or communities participating in electoral politics	QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE	Voters casting votes for the first time, based on election data
New organizations	QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE	Description of new organization that grew out of the campaign
New networks, coalitions or organizing relationships	QUALITATIVE	Description of connections or relationships that emerged from community organizing
New funders	QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE	Number of new funders
New audience or increased attention	QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE	Number of celebrities who publicly support, Description of national spotlight on the campaign
New access to decision making	QUALITATIVE	Description of being included on a new committee or getting a vote in a decision-making process
New positional power for communities that have been traditionally marginalized	QUALITATIVE	Description of being recognized as a leader

Table 1-B: Power-Building Process

PROCESSES		
METRIC	**TYPE OF DATA**	**EXAMPLE**
New frameworks or narratives in explaining an issue	QUALITATIVE	Description of how the campaign built out a new framework
New organizing models, strategies or tactics	QUALITATIVE	Description of new model for centering those most impacted
Expanding know-how to new groups around ballot initiative or other civic engagement processes	QUALITATIVE	Discussion of trainings, leadership development, capacity building
Community has autonomy and agency throughout the campaign	QUALITATIVE	Description of self-determination and freedom to set direction and make decisions
Community knowledge is respected in the process	QUALITATIVE	Description of community expertise being uplifted, shared, and valued
Accountability to community members	QUALITATIVE	Description of agreements or structures that ensure that accountability is to the community rather than funders, politicians, consultants, etc.

DATA COLLECTION

While our original research design included travel to each of the case study sites for in-person interviews, we altered our approach to conduct interviews via video conferencing due to constraints from the COVID-19 pandemic. **We conducted a total of 72 interviews with 88 individuals.** Eighty-one percent of interviews were one-on-one or two-on-one (with one or both of the primary investigators interviewing a single respondent). Group interviews accounted for the remaining 19%, averaging 3 people per interview. Interviews were conducted between June 2020 and May 2021. Interviews averaged 40 minutes, with the shortest interview lasting 17 minutes and the longest lasting 1 hour and 23 minutes.

Initial interviewees were identified through contacts in the field, as well as research into the ballot initiatives. From these contacts, we implemented a purposeful snowball sampling method [35], [36]. Interview respondents included activists, organizers, advocates, campaign staffers, nonprofit leaders, consultants, funders, and elected officials.

We conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews, a format that is open-ended and flexible; this approach allowed us to probe and pursue themes as they emerged [37]. Interview topics included descriptions of organizations (when applicable), respondents' experience working on the issue area, their role and work on the 2018 campaign, their partners and collaborators, organizing strategies and tactics, successes and challenges, campaign outcomes and future goals, lessons learned, and the roles of race, place, history, and culture. All interviews were video and audio recorded, and transcribed. Interviewers also recorded field notes for each interview.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

Interview transcripts were systematically coded and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti. Our analytic strategy followed both inductive and deductive logics. We drew on experiential expertise and theoretical insights to track important themes and develop initial codes for analysis. We also developed themes and codes that reflected the questions in our interview guide. Through regular team meetings (with project leads and the research associate) and the practice of memoing, we followed new themes as they emerged organically from the data and developed corresponding codes, in accordance with a grounded theoretical approach. Once major themes were identified, we returned to key respondents and advisors to the project to check our framing and analysis against the knowledge and perspectives of experts on the ground.

Table 2: Overview of Findings

ISSUE	AFFORDABLE HOUSING		MEDICADE EXPANSION		CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM	
STATE/CITY	Oakland CA	Portland OR	NE	MT	FL	LA
Win/Loss for ballot initiative/ amendment/ measure	win	win	win	loss	win	win
Ballot Initiative State[3]	yes	yes	yes	yes	initiative referenda only	no
Impetus for the Initiative[4]	Local Policy		Federal Policy		Directly Impacted	
Led by...	advocacy orgs / elected officials	metro / city official / advocacy orgs	Appleseed / advocacy org	hospital association / advocacy orgs	impacted / grassroots	impacted / grassroots
Ecosystem for this issue	robust	robust	semi-robust	semi-weak	strong-developing	weak-developing
Funding	$$$	$$	$$	$	$$	$
Built Power	no	no	some	some	yes	yes
Partisanship	blue	blue	red	red	purple	purple

DEMOGRAPHICS (2018)[5]	Oakland CA	Portland OR	NE	MT	FL	LA
Population	433,031	654,741	1,904,760	1,041,732	20,598,139	4,663,616
	Native American: 0.9% Asian: 15.5% Latinx: 27% Black: 23.8% White: 28.3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.6% Women: 51.7% Men: 48.3%	Native American: 0.8% Asian: 8.2% Latinx: 9.7% Black: 5.8% White: 70.6% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.6% Women: 50.4% Men: 49.6%	Native American: 0.7% Asian: 2.3% Latinx: 10.7% Black: 4.6% White: 79.4% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.1% Women: 50.1% Men: 49.9%	Native American: 6.2% Asian: 0.7% Latinx: 3.7% Black: 0.4% White: 86.3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.1% Women: 49.7% Men: 50.3%	Native American: 0.2% Asian: 2.7% Latinx: 25.2% Black: 15.4% White: 54.4% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.1% Women: 51.1% Men: 48.9%	Native American: 0.5% Asian: 1.7% Latinx: 5% Black: 32% White: 58.8% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0% Women: 51.1% Men: 48.9%

Table 2 provides an overview of the conditions that our six case study campaigns emerged from, and shows some of the high-level characteristics and campaign outcomes for each state. Moving from top to bottom, it shows whether the ballot initiatives passed, whether or not states allow residents to put initiatives on the ballot, who the campaign's target base was, who led the campaign, how robust the organizing and funding ecosystems were, whether the campaigns built power, and what state partisan politics looked like in 2018.

Building on the work of the Lead Local Project and the Praxis Project, we understand power-building to be a multi-faceted, dynamic process that has different textures depending on the context and is rooted in community agency, accountability, and solidarity.

Ballot Initiatives Can be Tools for Power-Building

Our six cases demonstrate how ballot measures and initiatives can be a tool for building power. Alexis Anderson-Reed, Executive Director of State Voices, said that she has seen ballot initiatives accomplish this when they are situated within a long-term strategy and used to facilitate collaboration between organizations. However, she also said, "as an isolated tactic, I don't think that they do [build power]." **Through our research, we established that an electoral win is not necessarily the most important metric for building power.** While Montana's Initiative 185 campaign failed to pass on the ballot, respondents attributed their success in convincing the legislature to renew Medicaid expansion in 2019 to the power they built through this campaign. In contrast, although Oakland and Portland's campaigns for affordable housing won, they did not build significant local power.

The Unanimous Juries Campaign in Louisiana and the Second Chances Campaign in Florida started as grassroots efforts that were led by people who were directly impacted by the criminal justice system. Of all of our case studies, these built the most power. Nebraska and Montana's campaigns were largely driven by advocacy organizations and built some power by activating people who stepped up to share their personal stories and garnered more public support for Medicaid expansion. While the campaigns for affordable housing in Oakland and Portland were both successful, they were initiated through collaborations between government officials and advocacy groups and they did not accomplish much in the way of building power or infrastructure. Coalitions were important in Oakland and Portland, too, but since organizations already had strong ties with each other and their bases, their 2018 campaigns did not help to forge new connections or politicize new people.

Many community members were activated through the campaigns in Nebraska, Louisiana, and Florida. In Nebraska, we heard several stories of people taking up the call to collect signatures, going to their hometowns, and qualifying their entire counties to get the initiative on the ballot. In Louisiana, someone approached canvassers at a football game, asked for a T-shirt and clipboard, collected signatures to qualify Amendment 4, and stayed involved through the end of the campaign. **These states all used relational organizing models, rooted in building relationships with community members and organizing around issues people cared about.** Faith-based institutional organizing was also a key part of the strategy in these states, and distributed organizing was central to Florida's Amendment 4 campaign as well. Participants in these states emphasized their investment in leadership development more than the other three campaigns, and many of the people who were brought in during their respective campaigns continue to be active and involved around these issues.

Campaigns that Centered People Who are Directly Impacted Built More Power

The campaigns for criminal justice reform in Louisiana and Florida were led by and for people who had been impacted by non-unanimous jury verdicts and voter disenfranchisement due to prior felony convictions, respectively. These campaigns helped to break the stigma around disclosing experience with the criminal punishment system and brought a large new base of voters to the polls. Organizers emphasized that persuading organizations, consultants, and more traditional establishment organizers to center people who were directly impacted was a fight and required a major culture shift. Leaders in Oregon recounted how consultants did not prioritize giving people who had experienced homelessness or housing instability decision-making power or having them act as spokespeople for the campaign, and Desmond Meade, President and Executive Director of the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, was not able to exercise real control until the coalition disbanded and he was able to form it anew. **Despite the reluctance of the nonprofit-consultant community to embrace the leadership of directly impacted people, campaigns that follow this model tend to win their campaigns and build power.**

Meade discussed the importance and prudence of following the lead of people who are directly impacted:

> *Movements don't happen overnight. Those that are going to be most willing to do [the work] are people whose life depends on it the most or people who are closest to the pain. We're not just doing it for a paycheck. I wasn't doing it for fame. I just wanted to be able to vote again. And I felt the pain of other returning citizens who wanted to be able to vote again. So it was just really focused on alleviating that pain, alleviating that barrier. I think if it was anybody else, they would not stick the 10 years doing something without getting paid and getting deeper and deeper into student loan debt. That was not going to happen.*

DESMOND MEADE

His point about the depth of his commitment and dedication is hard to contest and it was affirmed by many others in Florida. The arc of the Amendment 4 campaign and how it centered people who are closest to the pain is an example for other organizers around the country.

Dwight Bullard, Political Director of Florida Rising and a former State Senator in Florida, also made the case for all ballot initiative campaigns to follow Florida and Louisiana's lead

> *You need to center those directly impacted by the initiative. You literally need to have folks leading the conversations on a regular basis. They need to be the ones at the doors.*

Alison McIntosh, who convenes the Oregon Housing Alliance and worked on the Yes for Affordable Housing Campaign, admitted that they could have done more to center people who were directly impacted by Measure 102 and Measure 26–199 and said it is something that housing organizers in the state have since learned they need to prioritize.

Ballot Initiative Processes, Political Conditions, and Ecosystem Infrastructure Informed Campaign Structure and Outcomes

States' partisan politics, demographics, and ballot initiative processes impacted the texture of the campaigns. Nebraska, Montana, California, and Oregon are all ballot initiative states—states where community members can propose to change state laws by collecting enough signatures from voters to qualify the initiative for the ballot—while Florida's laws require initiatives to be referred by the legislature [39]. In Louisiana, the state legislature can put constitutional amendments on the ballot if they pass both chambers with two-thirds of the vote. These laws governing ballot initiatives influenced the lead-up to the campaigns and how they interfaced with communities. For instance, signature collection is required to place initiatives on the ballot in ballot initiative states, which encourages canvassers to be out in the field early. While this process is expensive, time-consuming, and can be challenging, it ensures that campaigns get an early start talking about the issue. In states like Louisiana, where the legislature rather than residents puts initiatives on the ballot , organizers had only a few months to build out their campaign and fundraise. Similarly, Oakland's Measure Y and Portland's Metro Housing Bond were put on the ballot by government officials, so they did not engage in a signature-collection process. This has tradeoffs—while it could have helped to build power, some organizers were relieved because it meant that they were able to allocate more of their time into fundraising and campaigning to get out the vote.

Similarly, the campaigns we focused on grew out of different sets of conditions and power-building ecosystems. California and Oregon have robust organizing networks with strong, long-standing coalitions, established connections between advocacy organizations and government officials, activated membership bases that are ready to mobilize around electoral politics, and connections with funders. Nebraska also has a semi-robust ecosystem with philanthropists such as Warren Buffett who are known to contribute to progressive campaigns, while Montana has a semi-weak ecosystem that is characterized by a mix of large advocacy organizations such as hospital associations, grassroots organizations such as Montana Women Vote and Western Native Vote, and chapters of national health nonprofits that serve specific populations.

In contrast, the 2018 campaigns were a catalyst for developing more organizing infrastructure in Louisiana and Florida. Ashley Shelton, Executive Director of the Power Coalition for Equity and Justice in Louisiana, describes how Norris Henderson, Founder and Executive Director of Voice of the Experienced (VOTE) and Voters Organized to Educate, built out a coalition for the Unanimous Juries Campaign and brought in $2 million for the campaign. She reflected on the campaign's reach: "This is the first time we're ever doing a campaign at this scale with these kinds of resources. We had done 2015 statewide elections,

but it was our first time really working together." Shelton went on to share how the infrastructure they built in 2018 continues to be the foundation for their work: "The ballot measure gave us the strength, the knowledge, the experience to move forward in time as we are being confronted with the exact same scenario... and put us in a position to be able to run a multimillion-dollar campaign that's Black-led, Black-informed, and Black everything."

In more established ecosystems, there was a stronger focus on tapping organizational partners for endorsements and relying on those as a way to move the needle of support. Relationships between 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations were important and gave progressive campaigns enough power to beat powerful opponents, such as the real estate lobby in Oakland. In Nebraska and Montana, coalitions that could reach into different pockets of the state were essential for mobilizing voters. Organizers described how all of the partners activated their bases so that together they were moving rural and urban communities, faith communities, people of different races and ethnicities, and people who were directly impacted. Louisiana and Florida's campaigns were more emergent and seemed to ride a unifying groundswell of support—forging new alliances between faith communities, bringing together networks of people with shared identities and experiences, and creating new ties between social justice organizations. National partners also played a significant role in Nebraska and Montana, helping with campaign incubation and providing technical assistance and funding. The Ballot Initiative Strategy Center was an important partner for jumpstarting Florida's Amendment 4 campaign, too,

and organizations in the other three states had connections with national organizations that played more supporting or tangential roles.

Organizers in Louisiana, Florida, Nebraska, and Montana said that their 2018 campaigns improved their local ecosystems and agreed that the infrastructure that was built during these campaigns strengthened organizing efforts. However, one respondent in Oregon shared that the white consultants who led the campaign had the opposite effect, poisoning the ecosystem and causing more long-term harm than good. This critique affirms that the process is just as important as the outcome, if not more so.
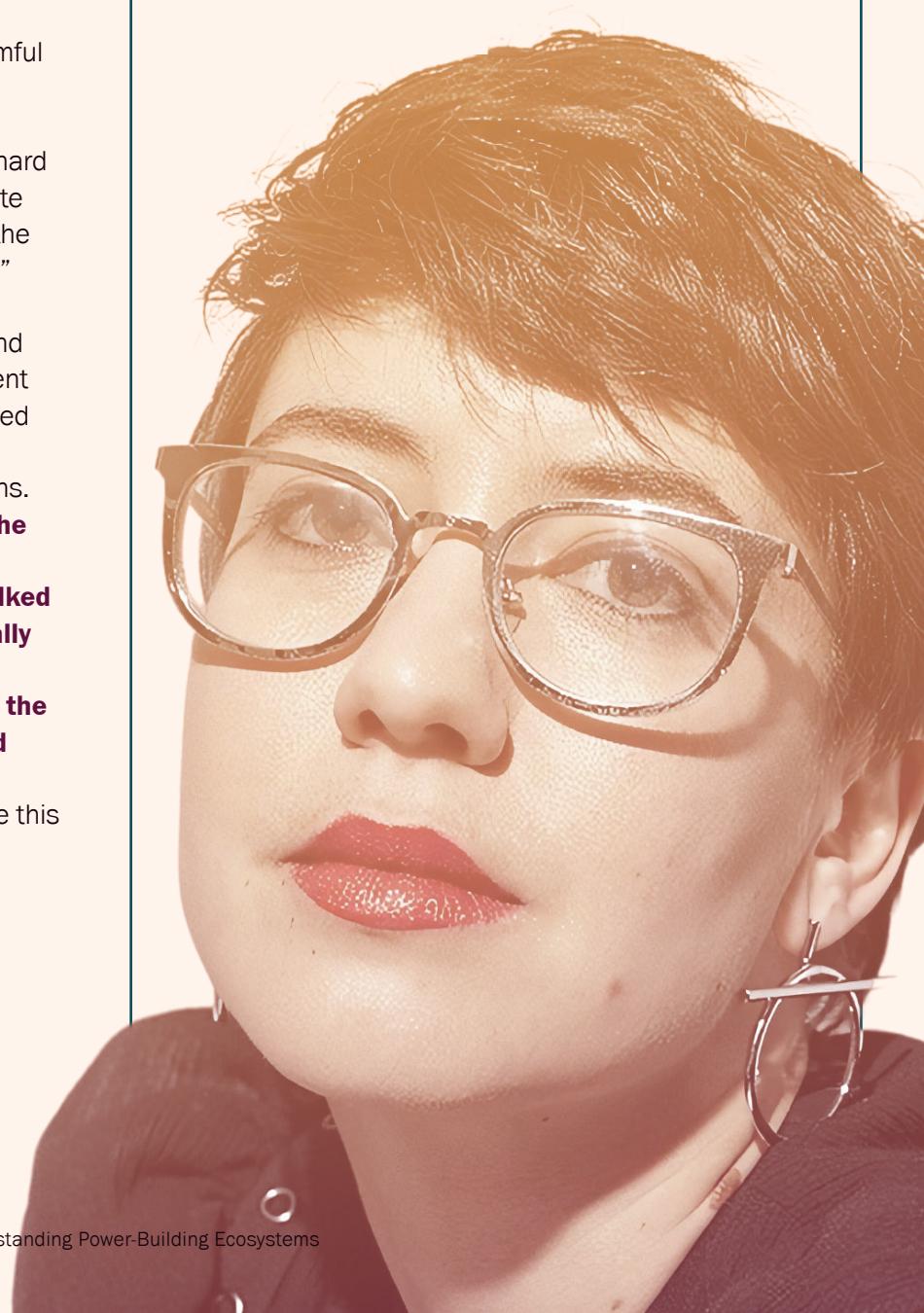
Through our research, we established that an electoral win is not necessarily the most important metric for building power.

Prioritizing Short-Term Wins over Transformative Change Weakens Ecosystems

SHABD SIMON-ALEXANDER

Organizations in five of the six states we researched (all except California) shared frustrations with the desire to win specific campaigns overshadowing long-term goals. In state after state, we heard stories where decision-makers chose to use harmful narratives under the pretense that they were necessary to win. In Oregon, consultants pushed messaging that tied deserving housing to being hard working, saying it was necessary to convince white suburban voters. In Florida, the campaign used the message, "Everyone deserves a second chance," which did not challenge the fact that Black and Brown people are systematically over-arrested and incarcerated. Mila Al-Ayoubi, the Voter Engagement Director for the Amendment 4 campaign, explained why they took this approach even as she and Desmond Meade fully understood the implications. **They spent years researching messaging for the campaign and ultimately found: "We couldn't really talk about race, because anytime we talked about race we would lose support from basically conservative swing voters. And the reason we cared that much was because 1) it's basically the South and we needed them. And 2) we needed 60% to win."** Al-Ayoubi, along with many others, expressed frustration and anger at having to take this

approach, but believed it was necessary to win and the first step in a longer strategy to shift public opinion about who deserves the right to vote. This choice created tensions in the coalition and some organizers opted to ditch the scripts and speak plainly about the Jim Crow laws and racism in the criminal justice system, knowing that it would resonate more with the people in their communities.

Shabd Simon-Alexander, the Distributed Organizing Program Manager for Florida's Amendment 4 campaign, told us about an interaction she had when she went on to work on another rights restoration campaign in New York:

> *The community members asked not to use the messaging that we used in Florida. They said, "You know, we'd rather not win for a few years and not use messaging that goes back on our long-term goals of being treated as full, respectable citizens... We just want to be treated like humans, and we don't want to use the messaging that hurts that long-term goal, even though we recognize that it might mean we don''t win." That's been complicated, because I know that this message won in Florida, but you have to look at what the goal is. And if the goal is passing a law, that's one thing. But if the goal is broader than that, that's something else.*

Shabd's reflection reveals the complexity in these decisions, and points to the need to give people who are directly impacted decision-making power so that they are in charge of the narrative.

I know that this message won in Florida, but you have to look at what the goal is. And if the goal is passing a law, that's one thing. But if the goal is broader than that, that's something else.

Another concern that came up throughout our interviews related to the fluctuations in funding and donors investing in specific campaigns rather than the movement. Organizers talked about how taking a long-range view and investing in work that shifts public consciousness would be transformational. Participants representing 11 organizations from every state besides California raised this point. Becky Gould, Executive Director of Nebraska Appleseed, explained:

There's a critical shift that needs to happen, especially in health care, where we start to think more about movement funding as opposed to campaign funding. We've seen too much of a big investment and then a pulling back of that investment that eviscerates the movement or your ability to continue to engage and maintain that movement. If the thinking around funding was a little bit more of, "I'm in this movement for the long term, and as groups are being successful in building and maintaining capacity, we have to continue to fund that for the long term." We had money during the campaign. We had a full-time organizer and staff, and two full-time contract organizers, and having three organizers full-time is a whole different game. Now we don't have one, and we're cobbling together from other staff and a fellow and other things. It has not put us in an ideal situation for whichever fight is ahead of us.

This call for more comprehensive and ongoing funding that can sustain the work between elections has been a focal point for activists for decades. Many argue that this model is ultimately more effective since it maintains momentum and allows for ongoing political education and leadership development, which ultimately matters more than any specific campaign [5], [6], [40].

BECKY GOULD

Many others also expressed the desire for resources to flow to Black and Brown organizers instead and to prioritize paying people who know the realities of the place rather than people who are considered experts by virtue of their degrees or resumes.

Gladys Washington, the former Deputy Director of the Mary Babcock Foundation, feels strongly about this. She shared her insights as a long-time funder:

> *I'll say it again, and I will say it probably until I die, [we need to give] general operating support. You give folks program support, you're halving them. This work requires general operating support so that those folks can move the way they need to move, so that they can affect change the way they see fit to do it, and it gives them the latitude and freedom to be able to create opportunities for people where there has not been any. We believe that you support organizations and that infrastructure during the creeping times and then during the leaping times. The creeping times are those times when it looks like nothing can change, that all hope is lost, but you still continue to work, you still continue to organize, you still can continue to pull people together, you still do leadership development, so that there will come a time when those things will be needed for that infrastructure. But if you don't build the infrastructure, then nothing changes in the way that makes any sense, certainly, like it just did electorally in Georgia.*

Washington's call to action clearly articulates why it is important to support long-term movement work and how this works in tandem with shifting away from prioritizing winning specific campaigns. Organizers with the Asian Pacific Environmental Network who worked on the Measure Y campaign in Oakland called for this, too, along with more support for 501(c)(4) organizations who are doing political work. They talked about how funders are less likely to give to 501(c)(4) organizations and 501(c)(3) nonprofits are not allowed to do electoral work, which leaves them in a bind. Overall, the call for more general support for political organizing work was salient everywhere.

Outside Consultants Often Amplify Power Imbalances and Create Challenging Organizing Conditions

Five of the six case study campaigns hired consultants to help with some portion of their campaigns—signature collection, communications, canvassing, or all three. Unfortunately, these relationships often proved to be challenging and 36% of respondents shared concerns about consultant infrastructure. Local organizers shared how they were routinely underestimated by consultants who came in from out of state and positioned themselves as the experts even though they did not know the local organizing ecosystem or communities. Tensions between consultants' short-term goals of winning campaigns also clashed against local organizers' long-term visions, as discussed already. Many people we interviewed advocated for hiring locally for campaigns since residents are more likely to be invested in the issues and keep the resources and knowledge in their communities.

In Florida, organizers spoke candidly:

> Our big rocks are the political consulting machine, where it is the same five people for everything that every foundation hires, that every campaign has to hire, that all the funders say, "These are the right people." And those folks are historically really great at losing, and are not paid to build infrastructure that lasts. It also hurts our ability to develop new folk, particularly when [the consultant is] focused on building her new people who don't get the relationship building and the long-term infrastructure building.

This concern about consultants being there for personal gain and taking the information they gather with them was a major concern in all of the states in this study besides California.

Consultants' extractive practices was also a common complaint from local organizers. In Nebraska, one respondent described the organizing model of DC-based consulting firm FieldWorks as "white supremacist bullshit that strangles communities." **This sentiment was shared among many of the campaigns who criticized consultants for having a mercenary-like, transactional approach to organizing around ballot initiatives and employing tactics that drain campaign resources.** In multiple states, we heard complaints about consultants collecting data on voters and then telling local organizers they would have to pay extra if they wanted access to it. Brandon Jessup from State Voices explained:

> It's a barter after the campaign to get your information back. You almost have to buy it back, which is a shame, especially if you think about how you just spent almost $3—maybe $4—million on collecting the data, and then you got to buy it back.

This perception that consultants were more focused on profit than meeting community needs was a sentiment that upset many organizers.

The vast majority of the consultants who worked on these campaigns—all of the ones that participants could remember—were white, which brings an additional set of challenges. In Louisiana, Shelton talked about how a white consultant explicitly told organizers not to talk about white supremacy when they were canvassing even though they were trying to change a Jim Crow law. **Many others also expressed the desire for resources to flow to Black and Brown organizers instead and to prioritize paying people who know the realities of the place rather than people who are considered experts by virtue of their degrees or resumes.**

Effective Organizing Strategies Include an Intersectional Analysis

Race played an important role in many of these campaigns, either as an explicit part of the strategy or as a blind spot that led to fractures and missteps along the way. **An intersectional analysis privileges the critical insight that race, class, gender, and more operate in reciprocal, related ways, and not as mutually exclusive entities.** Black women played major roles in three of the six states and many of the campaigns were carried by Black and Brown leaders. Race was also central to decisions about messaging— either in terms of framing the issue as being about racial justice or combatting white supremacy, or being purposefully left out in colorblind narratives meant to appeal to white voters.

Racism was a challenge raised by respondents from every state except for California. Organizers in Oregon, Nebraska, Florida, and Louisiana criticized white leaders for lacking a racial equity lens, putting canvassers in harm's way, and promoting messaging that ultimately upheld counterproductive narratives. **Despite the fact that all three of the issues these campaigns focused on—health care, housing, and criminal justice reform—disproportionately affect BIPOC, the consultants brought in to work on these campaigns overwhelmingly tend to be white.** Many participants shared strong feelings about white consultants coming into their communities with a sense of superiority and telling them what to do.

Campaigns that were led by multi-racial teams found that it helped them garner a broad spectrum of support. Having representative leadership and organizers also helped to convince voters to support these initiatives. Norris Henderson talked about his partnership with Ed Tarpley, a former prosecutor in Louisiana:

The campaign had some strange bedfellows. Ed Tarpley, who was the former prosecutor of Grand Parish, [and I] became literally the face of the campaign. To be in these rooms, the two of us, the former incarcerated guy and the former prosecutor, talking about why we should change this law, it resonated with a lot of people. Ed being a white guy, me being Black… it was like "Ebony and Ivory." It worked.

This highlights one kind of role for white people to play in these campaigns, and emphasizes how an approach that supports the leadership of people who are directly impacted can be effective.

NORRIS HENDERSON

Ballot Initiative Campaigns Generally Have Short Timelines that Require Fast Action

Time was an issue in every state, even Louisiana where the fight to repeal Jim Crow laws has been underway for decades. People who worked on the campaigns pointed to late approvals from the legislature; time consuming, expensive qualification processes; and funders being slow to invest in civic engagement work. Lack of time was also a source of stress and tension in many states—leading to hard decisions about whether or not to hire consultants to help with signature collection and canvassing, and forcing organizers to forgo other work to meet deadlines.

Alison McCrary, who managed the Unanimous Juries Campaign in Louisiana, shared the arduous struggle:

> *It took us years to get the legislature to pass this so we could get it on the ballot and once it passed in the legislature that summer, we only had a few months to build out a campaign and raise the money for it.*

Organizers in many states shared this experience, and they recounted how much time they had put into raising awareness and building connections, to then have only a few months to campaign because of how the state structured elections.

Mostly, the organizing leading up to the ballot initiative campaigns was slow and steady over a long period of time. Many of the case studies we share here consisted of long fights that culminated in short, rushed campaigns. Sheena Rolle worked as a community organizer on the Amendment 4 campaign in Florida and teased this out, saying:

> *I think it is really important for folks to remember that wins like this take a long, long time. It took from 2004 to 2018 to get it on the ballot, with no assurance that it was going to win. Hopefully we can shorten the time frame, but the level of relationship building, fundraising, coalition-building, and strategy have to be in place.*

This holds true even in a place like Oakland where the campaign was not as rushed, but depended on decades of tenant rights and housing justice organizing that created an ecosystem that was conducive to the success of Measure Y.

MILA AL-AYOUBI

One downside of the short timelines is the pressure it puts on campaigns to hire people who already have skills and tend to be more privileged and distanced from the issues. Al-Ayoubi shared her experience with this:

> *The reason we continue to do the boom and bust is because we never start early enough and so it creates a sense of urgency. And then people make racist, privileged decisions based on urgency... It causes the same problems over and over again. Like, I fought so hard to get funding for distributed organizers to do online organizing in 2018... So by the time I had the people, the money to be able to make hires, I needed them immediately and I needed them to be able to walk right onto the job already doing the work. So I ended up going with all of the volunteers I had been working with, who were doing this for free. And who are the volunteers who are able to do a shit ton of work for free? A bunch of privileged white folk, right? And so did I end up having a bunch of like white or lighter skin people of color on my team? Yeah, I did. And did that have really bad optics and its own consequences and for being an oppressor myself in that space? Yes, it was... you know, I have two seconds to get this up and running.*

Jamila Johnson, an attorney who worked for the Southern Poverty Law Center during the Unanimous Juries Campaign, shared a similar experience with time pressure and how it prompted her to push for the campaign to hire an outside consultant to help with doorknocking. While many organizers said that they wanted to hire local community members and pay them for the work, the realities of the campaigns and when they received resources led them to make decisions they may not have otherwise made.

This sentiment was shared among many of the campaigns who criticized consultants for having a mercenary-like, transactional approach to organizing around ballot initiatives and employing tactics that drain campaign resources.

Tailored Micro-Targeting Can Be More Effective than Messaging that Appeals to White Swing Voters

Organizers in four of the six states—all but California and Oregon—said that they tailored messaging to their constituents based on their race or ethnicity, and people who worked on the campaigns in Louisiana, Florida, and Montana talked about targeting communications to certain populations based on identifying information such as their political party, web searches, or place of residence, among others. This played larger roles in some states than others. Sometimes tailoring and targeting narratives was a strategy the campaign explicitly decided on, as in the case of Louisiana, where they purposefully had one set of messaging for white women and another set for Black and Brown voters. In other states, like Oregon and Florida, the official scripts used colorblind or racist messaging that did not resonate for many organizers. Consequently, organizers opted to go off-script and tailor their messaging to be more about the heart of the issues.

Our findings point to the fact that messages will often need to be tailored and that making this an intentional choice and meeting voters where they are works better than focusing exclusively on the messaging that will move white swing voters. Polling also contributes to the tendency to focus on this population since pollsters often focus on likely swing voters, who are often conservative white women, and prioritize messaging that speaks to them. This was the case in both Oregon and Louisiana. Meanwhile, this messaging often alienates BIPOC voters and organizers and can lead to fractures in interpersonal relationships and coalitions.

The Unanimous Juries Campaign in Louisiana is one of the better models for successful micro-targeting. While the campaign dealt with pressures from communications consultants who urged organizers not to talk about white supremacy or Jim Crow, Laura Veazey, who ran communications for the campaign, used polling data to reach people across the political divide digitally. Veazey described how they tailored messaging based on people's identities and web searches:

> *Digging into that poll and into the messages that worked, we focused on white women and a message about law enforcement being supportive of this [amendment]. We focused on this idea of liberty and that your liberty should not be taken away based on a non-unanimous jury. We even had a Republican legislator who did an ad about "You wouldn't want your right to own a gun to be taken away if there's a shadow of a doubt."… So if we were saying "Law enforcement supports Yes On 2," then if someone clicked on it, they would go to a page that was all about law enforcement speaking in support of it. And if we were sending out an image of a white police officer saying, "Vote yes on 2," we were not sending that out into Black voting communities. Or, you know, "End the Jim Crow law." We sent that into the progressive Black voter communities, and when they clicked on it, they saw videos of people who were innocent and wrongly convicted of unanimous juries. And so that's, I guess the, the short of it is, you know, the only message that really kind of went a little bit across the board was that Louisiana was an outlier on this issue.*

While framing the message in different ways for different audiences may not advance goals around changing narratives, this strategy did lead to success at the ballot for Amendment 2 in Louisiana—and it did so without creating as much tension around messaging as we saw in other states that focused exclusively on messaging that would move white swing voters.

Since micro-targeting needs to be specific, current, and localized to be effective, letting people on the ground determine what resonates in their communities, particularly communities that have been disenfranchised or that do not have a strong culture of voting or civic engagement, allows for more power-building and activation around issues and campaigns. We saw this in Montana with Western Native Voice hiring Native organizers from the urban communities they were hoping to mobilize, in Louisiana with Citizen SHE United hiring Black women from Shreveport, and in Nebraska with people from the Center for Rural Affairs speaking with people in rural areas. Ultimately, hiring people from the communities they were organizing in and trusting them to know how to communicate about the issue in a way that would resonate proved to be an effective antidote to the white swing voter myopia.

ASHLEY SHELTON

Reaching Beyond Likely Allies Helps Win Campaigns

The criminal justice reform campaigns' successful collaborations with surprising allies signal that this strategy can help campaigns win. In Louisiana, organizers formed alliances with people working as prison custodians, former prosecutors, and conservative lawmakers, which helped them build a broad spectrum of support that led to the monumental passage of Amendment 2. Henderson described this element of VOTE's strategy:

> *One of the things about prison… I don't know about other places, but in the South, folks deal based upon relationships that they have with people. And even when you are inside, you form relationships with your people. And these folks kind of get an understanding that wait a minute, my job is just the custodian, but the law that got a lot of y'all here is unjust. And so we were able to convince these people that yeah, these folks that you're holding, that's your job as a custodian, but this is a law that was created that put them in there. And so most folks stood up. And that was the thing that really surprised me when all the returns came back, that when we looked at all the parishes that we won and it was in what we call prison towns, where prisons are at. I was like that message really resonated because these folks know us. I mean, they know me specifically because, you know, I have a relationship with the Secretary of Corrections and we have carte blanche to go in every D.O.C. prison in the state with that message, so we were kind of like politicking inside… We had access to a population that the normal person running a ballot initiative wouldn't have. We had access to the people who are directly impacted by what was on that ballot. And when you have 44,000 people in prison who have 10 people on their visitor list, 20 people on their phone list, when you kind of like just do the aggregate of those numbers, you got 40,000 people with 10 people, that's 400,000 people there. Well we're halfway there, and that's just with people directly impacted.*

The relational organizing he describes effectively convinced not only people who had a stake because they were directly impacted by incarceration, but also more surprising allies such as people working as custodians who were then able to spread the message to their communities as well. Another unlikely ally who helped bring in more voters was a conservative state representative in the Louisiana legislature who was an Olympic shooter and Second Amendment advocate who had decided to produce and fund a video calling for people to vote for Amendment 2. This tipped off the campaign to the fact that a personal freedom and rights frame could be persuasive to some of the more conservative voters and generated more media coverage for the campaign.

Similarly, in Florida, organizers were able to show that restoring the right to vote was not just a Black issue and engaged white people who had been disenfranchised because of their previous convictions in the campaign, too. This helped to broaden the reach of the campaign and led to Amendment 4's landslide victory.

In contrast, white organizers in Montana and Oregon sought to build alliances with BIPOC-led organizations, yet made decisions that ended up alienating many of them. In Oregon, consultants championed messaging with a racist nostalgia frame that outraged BIPOC members of the coalition. In Montana, the decision to pair Medicaid expansion with a tobacco tax pushed away some potential indigenous groups and voters. Oregon's affordable housing initiatives passed but Montana's Initiative 185 did not, and these choices interfered with power-building in both places.

CONCLUSION

Based on our conversations with people involved in the power-building ecosystems in our six case study locations, our findings offer more nuanced ideas about context and place-based organizing. These results also highlight the importance of race and messaging and reveal some of the tradeoffs between time and power-building. In the following sections, we take a deeper dive into each of the cases and unpack what we can learn from their specific contexts, strategies, challenges, and successes.

BALLOT INITIATIVE CASE STUDIES

Understanding Power-Building Ecosystems

EXPANDING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING ON THE BALLOT

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

In 2018, voters in Oakland, California were presented with a city ballot measure to improve affordable housing policies for renters. Measure Y was "designed to amend eviction limitations law." The measure, which was referred to the ballot by city council members, would remove the exemption from Oakland's Just Cause Eviction law, which requires landlords to provide a reason for evicting a tenant, for owner-occupied two- and three-unit buildings. Additionally, this measure would allow Oakland's City Council to impose further limitations to landlords' ability to evict without being required to return the decision to voters. Oakland voters passed Measure Y with 58.37% of the vote, ending the just cause eviction exemption for two- and three-unit buildings in the city.

Oakland is a Northern California city that has faced high rates of gentrification and displacement, particularly among low-income and BIPOC residents. PolicyLink has documented declining income levels for residents of color and a shrinking Black population [41]. According to the U.S. Census, in 1980, Oakland's Black residents comprised 47.0% of the city's total population. By the year 2000, that number had dropped to 35.7%. The most recent population estimates from 2019 have Black residents accounting for only 23.8% of the city's overall population. In less than 40 years, Oakland's Black population has been cut in half. This displacement can be traced to dramatic shifts in the Bay Area economy, prompting rapidly rising costs and values of Oakland's housing market.

Nonprofit Professionalization and Partnering with Elected Officials on Ballot Measures

Oakland is also a city within a metropolitan region that is densely populated with nonprofit service and advocacy organizations. Stanford University's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society numbers the total number of nonprofit organizations in the Bay Area at approximately 15,000, or one nonprofit per 573 residents [42]. Service-based and advocacy organizations played a prominent role in getting Measure Y on the ballot. Leah Simon-Weisberg, an attorney who was with Centro Legal de la Raza during the 2018 campaign, explained how she discovered the need to end this exemption:

The Oakland case study demonstrates how a well-resourced, densely populated nonprofit ecosystem can move important pieces of legislation to improve affordable housing by bringing the issue to voters. However, it also shows how a professionalized advocacy and service sector can successfully win a ballot measure campaign in the context of a progressive city without building significant community power.

When I first came to Oakland, I started working at an organization called Centro Legal de la Raza, which is a legal service agency. I was directing the tenant program. I started doing direct services. After about two weeks, I identified immediately that everybody was receiving a 60-day notice claiming that the owner was going to move in. Well, that's exceptional. I worked in Los Angeles for about a decade and in that entire time, I represented 8 tenants in owner move-in cases. And I was the only person who did those cases [at the agency in Los Angeles]. So to see on a daily basis up to 10 notices like that amongst tenants is just... it doesn't make any sense.

Simon-Weisberg's professional experience in another city allowed her to detect how owner-occupied evictions were being abused in Oakland [43].

California is considered a "ballot initiative state," 1 of the 21 states in which citizens can refer statutes to appear on the ballot through initiative petitions. On average, California voters weigh in on 116 state propositions and 39 ballot initiatives or referenda each decade [43]. On top of these, voters are presented with ballot measures at the city and county levels. It can be incredibly expensive and time-consuming to collect the required signatures and mount a campaign for a citizen-initiated statute. **As a result, there is a professionalization of the process by which these direct-democracy approaches to governance are undertaken.** Measure Y illustrates this phenomenon.

Simon-Weisberg described the process by which laws can be changed to better protect Oakland tenants: "To [change the law], the rent control side can be done through [City] Council. But in Oakland, if you want to make a change to the just cause ordinance, you have to go through the ballot." She detailed the comparably high hurdle of signature collection to get an initiative on the ballot in Oakland—10% to 15% of registered voters, depending on the nature of the initiative. To avoid this process, she worked with Oakland City Councilmember Dan Kalb's office to have the measure referred to the ballot. She explained, "I drafted language, gave it to Dan Kalb's office, and then the city attorney drafted it." In an interview with Councilmember Kalb, he confirmed this chain of events. **The detailed knowledge of the process to change a city ordinance, the technical expertise needed to draft the initial language of the ballot measure, and the direct connection to the councilmember's office all point to the ways in which service and advocacy nonprofit actors use professional acumen and connections to bring issues to voters.**

LEAH SIMON-WEISBERG

In addition to knowing the process, Simon-Weisberg was attuned to the political commitments of Oakland City Councilmembers. Similarly, Councilmember Kalb noted that he had attempted to address the same issue in 2016, but did not have enough votes on the City Council to refer a ballot measure then. Simon-Weisberg knew of Kalb's support of tenants' rights and explained, "We mapped where the issues were happening, and it was District 1 and District 3. The District 3 [Councilmember] at the time was really terrible on tenant issues, so she was not going to be an ally. But District 1 was more progressive, and it was happening in his district, so he really took the leadership of [the ballot measure]."

To be sure, while the ballot measure was conceived of by an advocate, and referred to the ballot by City Council, grassroots organizations were also involved in the process. The Close the Loophole Coalition united service organizations like Centro Legal de la Raza, with grassroots organizations such as the Oakland Tenants Union. James E. Vann, a longtime organizer with the Oakland Tenants Union, discussed his organization's involvement:

> The principal sponsor was Councilmember Dan Kalb, the Councilmember for District 1, North Oakland. However, when it was developed and brought to the City Council, we made strong presentations, and brought out a lot of members and the tenant community to come to City Council and speak for the needs of people who had actually gone through some of the kinds of abuses that had happened [because] of this exemption. [We] pointed out that Oakland was one of the only cities that had this exemption. [The ballot measure] got the full support of [the] City Council, so it did go to the ballot with a unanimous vote.

Beyond expressing their support for the measure, local grassroots organizations like the Asian Pacific Environmental Network and Oakland Rising sent out voter guides and knocked on doors to get out the vote. They did not, however, engage in base building or transformational organizing efforts around this particular ballot measure.

> **The expert comes in, identifies the problem, works behind the scenes to fix it, and fixes the law. But I would not say that that is a particularly empowering method.**
>
> LEAH SIMON-WEISBERG

Simon-Weisberg reflected back on the process:

> The expert comes in, identifies the problem, works behind the scenes to fix it, and fixes the law. But I would not say that that is a particularly empowering method." While ultimately successful at protecting tenants from landlords abusing the exemption, the Measure Y campaign was not used as a way to educate, mobilize, or organize poor, working-class, or BIPOC voters, all of whom are overrepresented in Oakland's tenant population.

KEY MESSAGING & FRAMING:
Equal Rights and Protections

When asked to reflect back on the messaging for Measure Y, there was not a particular slogan or message the interviewees pointed to. In a progressive city like Oakland, it is possible that the need for creative or targeted messaging was not as pronounced. Camilo Sol Zamora, Co-Director of Housing, Land and Development at Causa Justa::Just Cause, described the messaging around equal protections:

One of the things that stands out was this narrative around everyone deserving the same rights, that it was not right nor just to have one neighbor that didn't have eviction protections or rent protections live across the street from another. We were actually seeing those stories play out in the conversations that the members that were engaged in this fight would have with their neighbors, speaking to neighbors who had those rights and just feeling horrible that their other neighbors did not.

In addition to framing the issue as one about equal protections for tenants, as suggested by the name of the coalition supporting the measure, the ballot measure was also framed as closing a loophole that was being abused by landlords to evict long-term tenants in order to be able to raise the rent. Under the campaign section of the Oakland Tenants Union website is proclaimed **"Close the Loophole: Protect Oakland Renters from Eviction!"**

CAMILO SOL ZAMORA

What proved to be impactful was the lived experience and life story of the Webb family, three generations of whom were living in a three-unit building, and who were evicted and ultimately displaced from Oakland. Simon-Weisberg described how their story prompted her to take action:

This happened to the Webb family. My experience [has been that] you are representing tenants, you are enforcing the law as it is, and then suddenly, you realize there's this huge loophole that is preventing you from protecting people who really need to be protected. And this family is one of those. This is a family that had lived in their triplex since the '70s. The children had all been born in the building. Eventually, when they became adults, they moved into the other units as they became open. When I met this family, the son lived in one unit, the daughter lived in another, and the grandmother lived in the third.
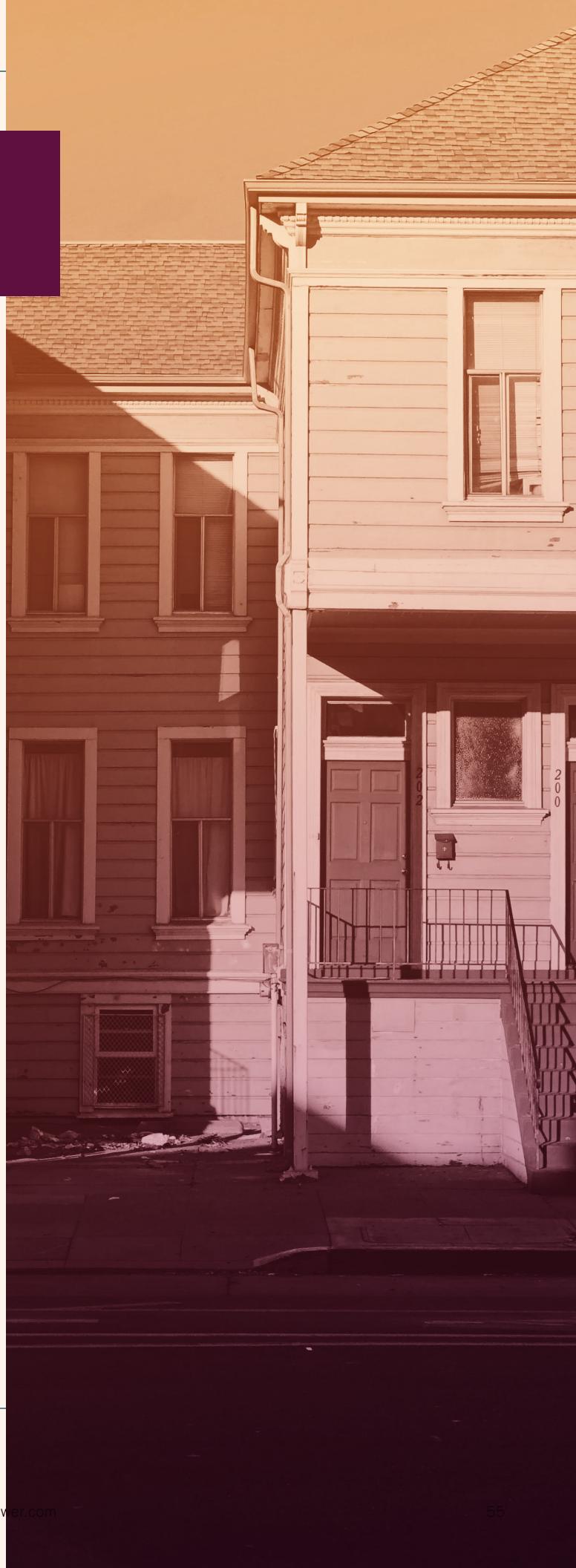
And the landlord was in the process, first of trying to raise their rent. This landlord was a young kid, I don't think he was even 25. Initially, we fought the illegal rent increase. So that failed. His next strategy was, "Well, I'm going to pretend to move in." So he served [an eviction notice to] the grandmother who was paying the least amount of rent, which was illegal. You can't do that. You can't serve owner move-ins on people over 65 or people who are disabled. So that protected the grandmother. But then all he did was find the person in the family that didn't qualify. So they tried evicting the son, which was successful. [The landlord] didn't have to provide relocation because we hadn't changed the law yet. And so suddenly, the landlord moves into the son's apartment. Never lives there, starts doing construction, and while doing construction claims he's living there. And he serves both the daughter and the grandmother a 60-day notice. No cause. What was frustrating the whole time is what he was doing was legal.

The campaign uplifted the Webb family's experience, among others, and the local news picked it up as well. **Bringing real stories to voters humanized the loophole in the city law.** At the same time, community members who shared their stories were not activated through the campaign. Interviewees did not report any of these families becoming actively involved in the fight to end displacement, gentrification, or the housing crisis in Oakland or elsewhere.

Bringing real stories to voters humanized the loophole in the city law.
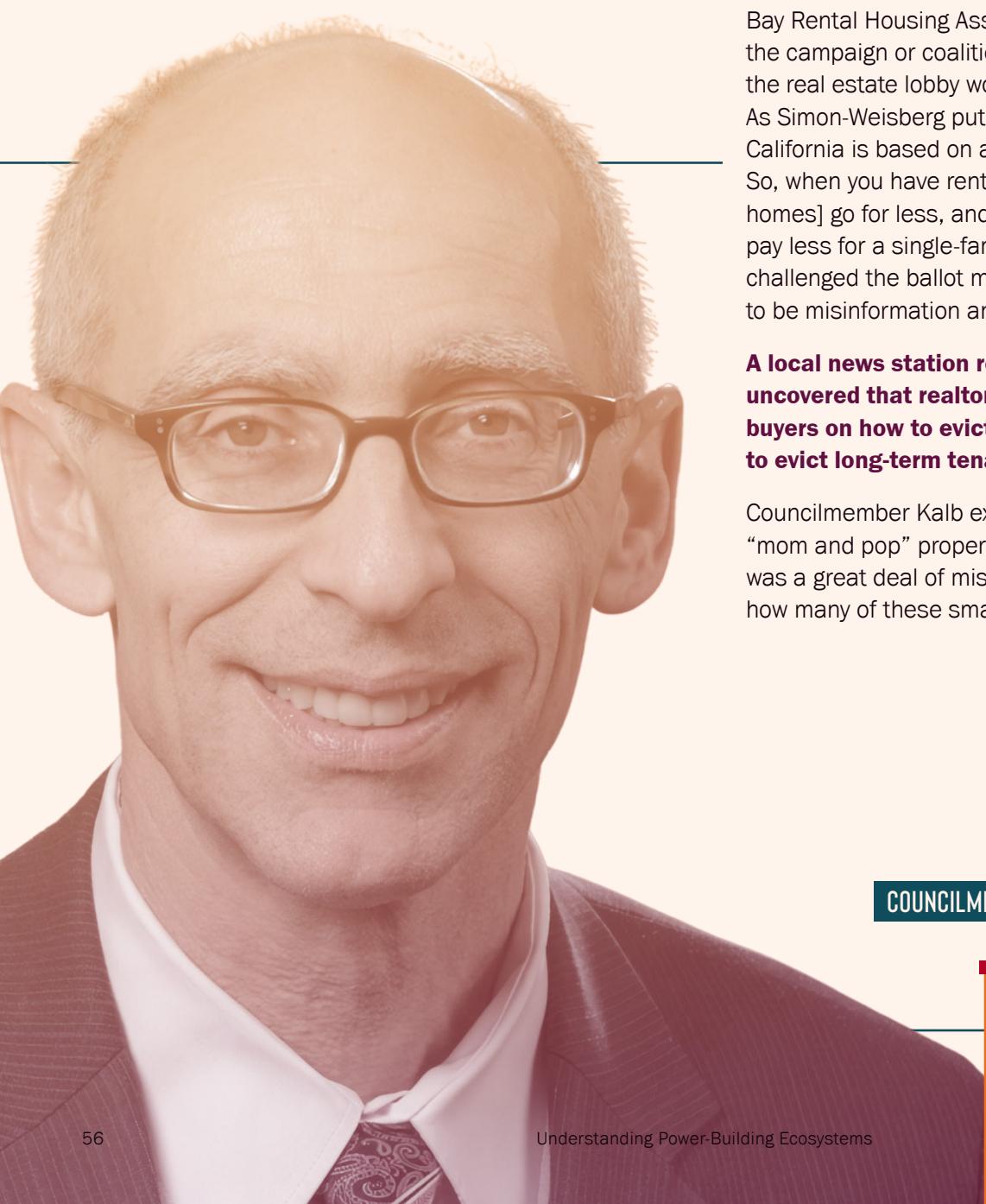
Pairing Local Measures with Statewide Initiatives

In 2018 when Measure Y was on the ballot in Oakland, a statewide proposition to strengthen tenant protections was also proposed to voters across the state of California. Proposition 10 aimed to repeal the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act, which limits the use of rent control in California. Because Measure Y and Prop 10 were both intended to strengthen protections for tenants, organizers decided to pair the campaigns. Zamora explained Causa Justa::Just Cause's position on the measures; **"We were for Prop 10 from the very beginning, so it was a no brainer. For us, [pairing Measure Y and Prop 10] was like the local iteration of tenant protections and the statewide iteration of tenant protections teaming up."** When tenants' rights organizers encouraged Oakland voters to support Measure Y, they also asked them to repeal Costa-Hawkins at the state level by voting for Prop 10. Simon-Weisberg explained, "it was the unions that assisted in a lot of the infrastructure in terms of the financial support. They also were working really hard to try and get rid of Costa Hawkins at the time. So they were willing to help combine the campaigns. So that made a huge difference." **Combining campaigns was an effective strategy for consolidating resources and expertise. However, it only proved successful for one campaign; while Prop 10 did not pass, Measure Y did.**

CHALLENGE

Misinformation from the Real Estate Lobby

Many respondents noted that the primary opposition was the real estate lobby, and specifically the East Bay Rental Housing Association. It was no surprise to the campaign or coalition supporting Measure Y that the real estate lobby would oppose the city measure. As Simon-Weisberg put it, "[Realtors'] commission in California is based on a percentage of the sale price. So, when you have rent control, then [multi-family homes] go for less, and if you're paying less rent, you'll pay less for a single-family home." The real estate lobby challenged the ballot measure with what some deemed to be misinformation and suspect tactics.

A local news station reporting on Measure Y uncovered that realtors were coaching potential buyers on how to evict tenants and using the ability to evict long-term tenants as a selling point [44].

Councilmember Kalb expressed empathy for small, "mom and pop" property owners, but noted that there was a great deal of misinformation being spread about how many of these small landlords would be affected:

COUNCILMEMBER DAN KALB

I bet almost all the landlords who showed up to testify [before City Council] were indeed good people who would not [exploit the exemption]. But there are a lot of landlords who do that. They have no hesitation. Whether they are speculators or they come in or buy a place and live in it for a little bit in order to be able to kick people out. People just take advantage of any loophole that exists.
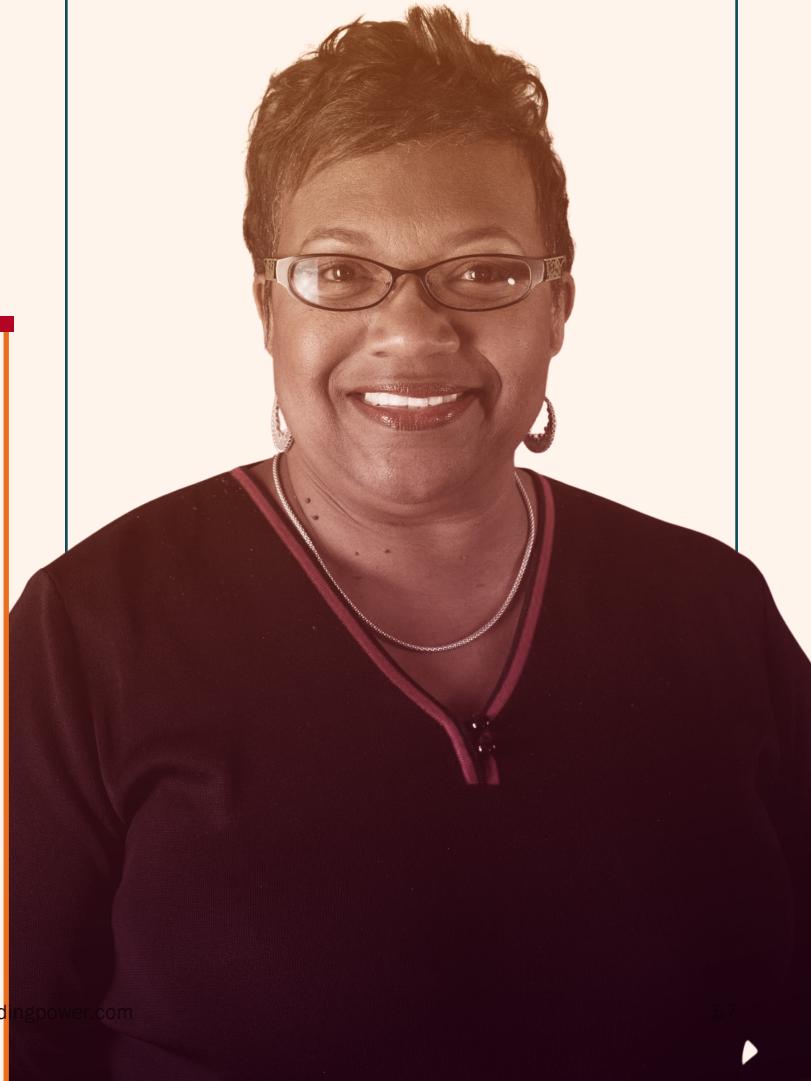
The reality on the ground was more complex than owners versus renters. Zamora expounded upon some of the considerations when pitting small landlords against tenants:

I think what has been hard is the whole story of the mom and pop landlord. There are things that we are going to continue to struggle with under capitalism and landowning. There are a lot of fears and misinformation spread by realtor associations that it's not in [landlords'] interest to give up rights, what they see as their right to control who they rent to and [for] how much. And oftentimes [the landlords are] folks of color and they are immigrants too. So that is where class really plays a bigger storyline than race.

Grassroots organizations working to secure tenants' rights offered a nuanced analysis of the dynamics of race, class, and immigration status in thinking about the communities they serve and organize.

Despite the challenges of misinformation and morally questionable tactics, the real estate lobby did not throw as much money behind opposing the ballot measure as they could have. As Simon-Weisberg noted, "We have generally not had a lot of opposition for pro-tenant initiatives. [The real estate lobby] could outspend us. But they have never been able to win by initiative. They have always had to win by going to Council."

SHERYL WALTON

EXPANDING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING ON THE BALLOT

PORTLAND, OREGON

In 2018, two interrelated ballot measures—intended to allow nonprofits and other private developers in Portland to build affordable housing—were brought to Oregon voters, one in the tri-county Portland metropolitan area, and the second at the state level. The first measure was to amend the state constitution to remove a "restriction that affordable housing projects funded by municipal bonds be government owned." This became Measure 102, which was run at the state level and passed with 56.90% of the vote. This amendment at the state level supported the Portland bond measure, Measure 26–199, which provided $652.8 million towards affordable housing in the Portland Metro area: Washington, Clackamas, and Multnomah Counties. Voters approved this bond measure as well with 65.76% of the vote. The simultaneous change to the state constitution meant that the new affordable housing built through the bond measure could be owned or operated by city partners rather than government agencies alone. Both measures were put on the ballot by the Oregon Metro Council (known colloquially as Metro), the tri-county Portland metropolitan area's regional government.

Like Oakland, the ballot measures in Oregon were lucky to face a liberal electorate. With Oregon also being a ballot initiative state, we observed a professionalization of the process for Measure 26–199 and 102 alike. While in Oakland, the lack of power built seemed to be at least partially due to the process, in which a self-proclaimed policy expert led the charge for getting the issue on the ballot, in Oregon a more pernicious process prohibited power-building, particularly in BIPOC communities. Despite bringing BIPOC-led organizations to the table to help shape the measure, they felt tokenized when the campaign moved forward with framings that did not align with their values. This turned off grassroots organizations representing BIPOC communities and many ultimately decided not to put much of their time or resources behind the campaign.
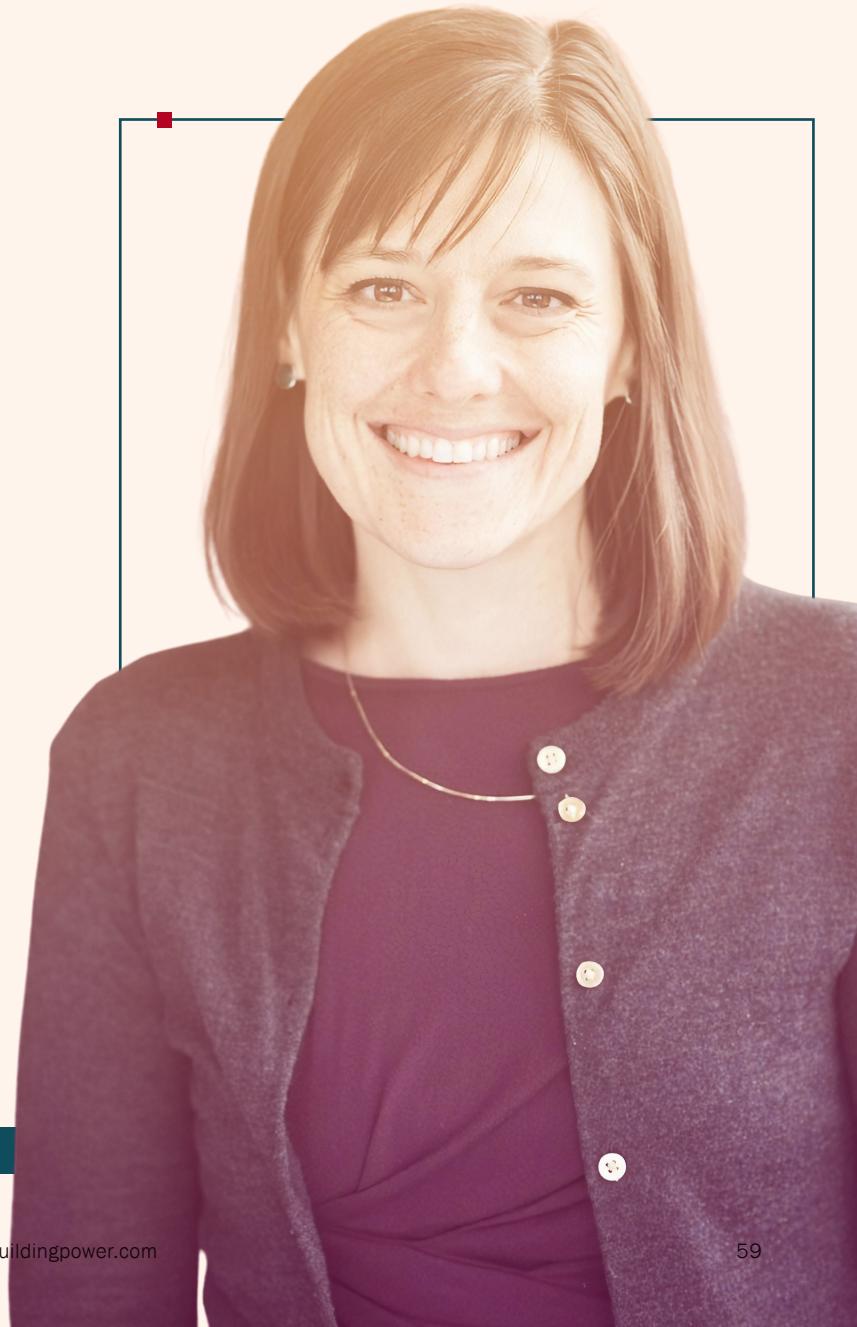
Metro-led Measure

The decision to bring affordable housing measures came from Metro. Like Oakland, this measure was not resident-led or initiated. Alison McIntosh, who serves as the Deputy Director of the nonprofit Neighborhood Alliance and convenes the Oregon Housing Alliance coalition, described the rationale behind the local and state-level measures:

In 2016, there was a bond measure for affordable housing in the city of Portland alone. I worked on that campaign as a volunteer and my organization endorsed the measure. At the time the measure was referred [to voters by the City of Portland], they knew that because it was a general obligation bond, there was this weird provision in the Oregon constitution that meant the City of Portland would have to own and operate any housing that was built with those dollars. That is not a role that we see city governments or county governments typically playing, particularly now. We have public housing authorities, and we have nonprofit and for profit affordable housing providers who comply with a lot of rules and restrictions about that housing. But a city owning and operating housing wasn't traditional or typical. And from an affordable housing wonk perspective, which is always what I bring to these conversations, it also limited the tools that we could use.

ALISON MCINTOSH

McIntosh continued the explanation of how Measure 102 was brought before voters:

> *In the fall of 2017, we put together some resources and some smart people to put together a poll to ask voters what they thought of this question. And we actually polled on what became Measure 102 as well as another kind of wonky bonding issue. The state bond question polled really terribly. The polling on what became Measure 102 wasn't fabulous either, but it wasn't nearly as bad as the state [bond] measure. So we decided to go forward with the polling with a question on 102. [We] spent a lot of time with the folks at Metro and the City of Portland and the Speaker's office to craft a measure that the legislature would pass and refer to voters. We had an existing coalition that was able to push that in the legislative process. It passed unanimously in the House and had strong bipartisan support in the Senate. After the titling process in May, it joined forces with the Metro measure to fund affordable housing bonds. So the campaign was unified.*

McIntosh delineates how policy "wonks" like herself, and advocacy organizations participated in shaping what would become Measures 102 and 26–199. She does not mention input or involvement of community members or directly impacted people.

Community input did, however, help shape Measure 102. Becca Uherbelau—who is the Executive Director of Our Oregon, and worked on the affordable housing measures in her capacity there, but also worked at Metro when the affordable housing measures were in their initial phases of conception—recalled that approximately six to eight months prior to the referral date, Metro had engaged in learning opportunities from BIPOC communities to support their racial equity strategy. She recounted

> *We were partnering with the Coalition for Communities of Color and Momentum Alliance to do these culturally specific community conversations that were to inform the racial equity strategy. And in every single one—we were talking about issues facing the community—and housing affordability was number one.*

Uherbelau noted that Metro had initially intended to refer a transportation measure in 2018, but shifted course because the need for housing was so acute and BIPOC-led organizations were calling for solutions.

Because both measures were referred through Metro, this bought the campaign time they would not have had had they been required to collect signatures to get these issues before voters. Megan Wever, who managed the statewide coalition and ran communications for the campaign, clarified, "Both the statewide [measure] and the Metro bond were referrals, so while all of our fellow colleagues working on measures were still in the signature gathering phase, we were launching our full coalition."

Pairing City Measures with Statewide Initiative & Candidates

The local and state measures were run together as a combined effort through the "Yes for Affordable Housing" campaign. Wever noted that she had not previously seen a local and statewide measure run together. She reflected that in this pairing, the two worked well because in most of the state, housing bonds for affordable housing had never been raised. Pairing the local bond with the constitutional amendment provided a clear example of how the abstract rule would apply for voters outside of Portland. Even still, Wever explained, "Yes for Affordable Housing's messaging was promoting both measures, but it was really focused on the Portland Metro area."

KEY MESSAGING & FRAMING: Racist Nostalgia

The campaign struggled around its messaging, which coalition members representing and serving BIPOC communities found offensive. Angela Martin, Senior Director of Wheelhouse Northwest, the consulting agency that spearheaded the campaign logistics, described the framing: "We constructed a message that said, 'It used to be, if you worked hard, you could afford a place to live.' [We] tapped into nostalgia, 'we used to be able to afford,' and merit 'work hard and you should be able to afford a roof over your head.'" Duncan Hwang, the Associate Director at the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), described how the nostalgia frame landed for him:

"Basically, they came up with a message that was like, 'Make America Great Again.'" The proposal to use a similar framing to the Trump administration for a progressive measure was problematic for organizations speaking to BIPOC voters. Beyond that, the message did not resonate for BIPOC since the reality this framing evoked only existed for white people.

The values-based frames of nostalgia and merit were chosen because they polled best with older white, Republican women. Martin recalled, "I walked in with these findings that showed if I use this message, I could get that 60-year-old Republican woman in Washington County to say yes on raising taxes for affordable housing." She acknowledged that this approach lacked a racial equity lens. Martin now takes responsibility and calls the experience "a place of learning." She elaborated:

> There's a tension point that I fully expect to run into every time I run a campaign around the messaging, because there are ways that you talk about systems change, social change. There are long-term messaging goals and there are short-term messaging goals. And there's a difference of opinion among those who want to see a campaign's message be in service of the long-term, social change goals. And I get that. I don't think a campaign message should ever be in conflict with those long-term social messaging goals, but I am a practitioner of public opinion research and understand the timeline. So I'm of the opinion that I need to speak to the audience that's showing up on election day and get them to "Yes." So there's a real tension there that has always caused a moment of conflict. It certainly did in 2018.

This focus on the "yes" votes over the experiences and messaging that would speak to communities most directly impacted by the issue alienated some members of the coalition. Multiple interviewees expressed their frustration with this approach. Jenny Lee, Deputy Director of Coalition of Communities of Color, recounted a heated discussion about the messaging with the consultant team in which she declared, "Even if that's what your testing says, it's still racist." Robin Ye, who was the Political Director for APANO in 2018, described his organization's position:

> At the heart of the work we do is to try our best always to center the folks most impacted. And this campaign was actively trying to obfuscate who would be the beneficiaries of affordable housing, because they did not want to tip off their Clackamas and Washington County voters that people of color were going to receive [the benefits].

Eventually, the campaign dropped the nostalgia frame and kept the merit-based frame. Wever noted that while dropping the nostalgia frame may have assuaged some organizations working with BIPOC communities, organizations serving unhoused populations still found the merit-based frame problematic because it implied that people must have a job to deserve housing.

Ultimately, BIPOC-led organizations found the campaign to be harmful, both to communities of color and to efforts to expand affordable housing. As a result they chose to be minimally engaged in the campaign—endorsing the measure and weighing in on coalition decisions and having their involvement end there.

Understanding Power-Building Ecosystems

DUNCAN HWANG

Organizations working in BIPOC communities responded by rejecting the framing altogether. When asked how the message was tailored for the communities in which APANO worked, Ye simply responded, "Oh, we just didn't use any of their framing." He asserted that Measure 102 and Measure 26–199 were lower on APANO's priority list when engaging with voters because it was already likely to win and there were other, more pressing measures on the ballot that would have consequences for immigrant communities and reproductive health. **He concluded that they put their energy elsewhere in the 2018 elections because "[The other measures] were frankly just more important and less racist."** Hwang shared what he would have liked to see as the framing:

> *It should actually be a frame about community resilience, or community strengthening... We thought [the messaging for the campaign] was an opportunity to reframe the conversation and talk about how mixed income neighborhoods are generally more successful and happy. And the anti-displacement angle: we want to be able to stay in place and not get pushed out.*

Ultimately, BIPOC-led organizations found the campaign to be harmful, both to communities of color and to efforts to expand affordable housing. As a result they chose to be minimally engaged in the campaign—endorsing the measure and weighing in on coalition decisions and having their involvement end there.

CHALLENGES

Consultants

Many respondents described the consultants on the campaign as lacking humility, empathy, and curiosity. Some BIPOC organizers said they wished consultants had acknowledged their expertise and leadership earlier on and done more to prioritize the communities most impacted by Measure 102.

A Missed Opportunity for Power-Building

Measures 102 and 26–199 failed to build power. As Hwang noted, "A lot of POC-led organizations were involved in the formulation of 102, but not in the campaign." The campaign effectively alienated organizations serving BIPOC communities, discouraging them from building power around affordable housing through the ballot measure campaign. Instead, these organizations focused their attention and efforts on candidates and ballot measures that resonated more with their communities.

POWER-BUILDING ASSESSMENT: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The following table offers a breakdown of how the affordable housing campaigns scored on our power-building assessment. It offers some insight into why these campaigns did not build as much power as some of the other campaigns and highlights opportunities to prioritize community involvement in the future.

Table 3. Affordable Housing Campaigns Power-Building Assessment

OUTCOMES		
METRIC	**Yes/No**	**DETAILS**
Newly activated individuals	No	Activating new people was not part of the strategy for these specific campaigns.
New voters or communities participating in electoral politics	No	Oakland's campaign targeted organizations' existing voting blocks, while Portland's campaign targeted white middle-class women, which is standard practice for moving swing voters.
New organizations/programs	No	Respondents did not describe creating new organizations or programs.
New networks, coalitions or organizing relationships	Somewhat	In Oakland, the Close the Loopholes Coalition emerged, which repositioned which organizations held leadership positions. ACCE and Causa Justa::Just Cause collaboratively led the field work and Centro Legal led the policy work. In Oregon, the Welcome Home Coalition, which was coordinating the Yes for Affordable Housing Campaign, fractured over tensions around the messaging. One organizing relationship that was deepened as a result of this campaign was with the Oregon Food Bank. The Food Bank formally dedicated some of an employee's time to the campaign and leveraged its statewide network.
New funders	No	Respondents did not describe new funding streams nor relationships with funders.
New audience or increased attention	No	Interviewees openly stated that these were not the most exciting or noteworthy issues on the ballot in 2018 and thus did not receive much attention.
New access to decision making	No	These campaigns leveraged the decision-making power they already had rather than improving access for new groups or individuals.
New positional power for communities that have been traditionally marginalized	No	Respondents did not describe shifts in positional power that occurred during the campaign, however, communities that have been traditionally marginalized may have gained more power after the fact because of the policy changes.

Table 3. Affordable Housing Campaigns Power-Building Assessment, *continued*

PROCESS		
METRIC	**Yes/No**	**DETAILS**
New frameworks or narratives in explaining an issue	No	Neither Oregon's nostalgia frame nor Oakland's gentrification frame were new.
New organizing models, strategies or tactics	Somewhat	The strategy of linking local measures with statewide ballot initiatives is not necessarily new, however, it is noteworthy.
Expanding know-how to new groups around ballot initiative or other civic engagement processes	No	Respondents did not mention this in our conversations.
Community has autonomy and agency throughout the campaign	No	In both Oakland and Portland, nonprofits carried out much of the organizing, which did not create many opportunities for community participation or control.
Community knowledge is respected in the process	Somewhat	In Oakland, many of the organizations in the Close the Loopholes Coalition have grassroots bases that they are responsive to and this respect for community expertise and knowledge is carried into their organizing. In Portland, respondents said they wished consultants had acknowledged their expertise and leadership earlier on and done more to prioritize the communities most impacted by the housing crisis. However, the consultants ultimately moved away from the racist nostalgia messaging because of how community partners responded, which shows some baseline respect for their perspective.
Campaigns are accountable to community members	No	While organizations in both cities serve community members, respondents did not mention agreements or processes that would ensure that campaigns were held accountable to community interests and needs.

TAKEAWAYS FOR LOCAL POWER-BUILDING IN LIBERAL CITIES

Professionalization, Technicality, and Progressive Contexts as Barriers to Power-Building

The affordable housing campaigns built the least power of all the case studies. This seems to be at least partially due to the professionalization of the ecosystems and how systematized processes have become. The measures themselves were also more administrative and technical issues and did not resonate in the same way as the fights to restore the right to vote or require unanimous jury verdicts in the South, for example. Another interesting potential barrier to power-building was the fact that these measures originated in liberal, progressive-leaning cities that already had some support from elected officials. Organizers described how they expected the measures to pass from the start since they were led by experienced advocates and the legislatures were receptive, whereas other fights in 2018 required more to win. With electoral results as the goal these characteristics may be seen as positive, however, our findings show that they also may hinder power-building.

Skipping Signature Collection Has Its Tradeoffs

While foregoing the signature collection phase of the campaigns saved time on the front end and gave organizers more time for actual campaigning, fundraising, and getting out the vote, it also detracted from building power in communities and raising awareness about or long-term commitment to the issue.

Pairing Local and Statewide Measures Can Be Beneficial

Both local ballot measure campaigns benefited from aligning themselves with related statewide campaigns. The partnerships granted them access to powerful coalition partners and resources that helped bring them electoral success. In Oregon's case, having the Portland measure as an example of what cities would be able to do under the new law helped to clarify how the otherwise abstract policy applied, which was then helpful at the state level.

Messages that Prioritize Short-term Wins Can Be Harmful

Targeting swing voters with messages that are more focused on winning campaigns than changing distorted narratives can harm communities who stand to benefit from the policies. In Oregon's Yes for Affordable Housing campaign, we saw how the decisions to use messaging that centered white voters and moderate Republicans turned off coalition partners who may have otherwise seen the campaign as a tool for building power. Ultimately, this shows how narrowly focusing on winning specific campaigns and letting this inform the messaging may alienate important populations.
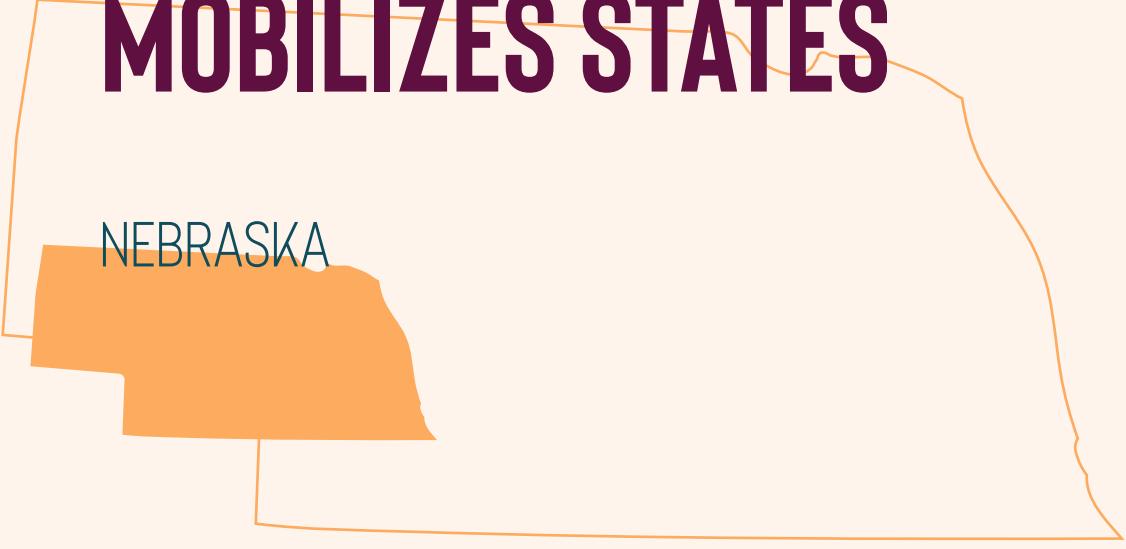
Campaigns Raise Awareness

While power-building was minimal in Oakland and Portland, the ballot measures helped to educate voters and raise awareness about local housing rights organizations. Eddie Ytuarte, a longtime organizer with the Oakland Tenants Union, unpacked this, saying, "I think it's because of Measures like JJ and Y that inform people. It gets renters aware that there's something else happening out there. It gets our name out there, it gets the name of ACCE out there. I think the elections themselves set the stage for a more aware public and more aware group of renters." This greater recognition and awareness could lay the foundation for future campaigns and power-building efforts.

Leveraging Direct Democracy

In a liberal city like Portland, we learned that it can be easier to pass progressive legislation through direct democracy than through city council or other legislative bodies. Martin explained this: "Ballot measures really were a way to leverage the quintessential 80/20 issue, where 80% of the public supports something, but yet our lawmakers, whether they're at the state level or the local level, are out of sync with the public."

MEDICAID EXPANSION MOBILIZES STATES

NEBRASKA

In 2018, a ballot initiative, Initiative 427, was brought to Nebraska voters to expand Medicaid. Nebraska's "Medicaid Expansion Initiative" passed with 53.55% of the vote [45]. Though the rollout has been fraught with delays and challenges, the law now requires the state to provide Medicaid to individuals under the age of 65 whose income is equal to or less than 138% of the federal poverty line. The case study in Nebraska offers important insights into building power around what is typically considered a progressive issue in a red state. This case also illuminates the challenges as well as the importance of tailored strategies when campaigning in rural versus urban areas.

For years, advocates and moderate conservative lawmakers tried unsuccessfully to pass bills to expand Medicaid in Nebraska through their nonpartisan unicameral state legislature. Senator Campbell and Senator McCollister worked hard in those first four years to try and build a coalition of lawmakers that could get the bill through the legislature. As Molly McCleery, the Director of the Health Care Access Program for Nebraska Appleseed, recalled, a Medicaid expansion bill was first brought to the Nebraska legislature in 2013. The bill was reintroduced yearly with the backing of her organization and received, according to McCleery, "progressively less attention and less support." Each time, these bills died in committee or on the floor.

A turning point for Nebraska came on the heels of Maine's success in passing Medicaid expansion by ballot initiative in 2017. Much like Nebraska, Maine had a governor who was hostile to Medicaid expansion, which had a chilling effect on what was politically feasible through the state legislature, and which made the voters' will more impactful. Upon learning of the win in Maine on election night 2017, Nebraska State Senator Adam Morfeld tweeted, "I will introduce a proposed Medicaid Expansion ballot initiative in the Nebraska Legislature in 2018. It's time to let the people decide." From there, Senator Morfeld reached out to those who had worked on the issue in Maine and began collaborating with national, Washington D.C.-based organizations, such as the Fairness Project and Families USA, and local organizations, which had long worked on this issue, most notably Nebraska Appleseed.

This approach, turning to voters when elected officials are out of step with the desires of their constituents (as measured by the polling prior to the campaign and the success of the ballot initiative), was an important driver of the use of ballot initiatives, measure, and amendments not just in Nebraska but in other cases in this study.

Senator Adam Morfeld ✓ @Adam_Morfeld · Nov 7, 2017 ...
I will introduce a proposed Medicaid Expansion ballot initiative in the Nebraska Legislature in 2018. It's time to let the people decide.

> **The New York Times** ✓ @nytimes · Nov 7, 2017
> Maine voters approved an expansion of Medicaid in direct defiance of Gov. Paul LePage
> nyti.ms/2zoLau9
> Show this thread

💬 21   ↻ 187   ♡ 643   ⬆

BUILDING POWER THROUGH KEY ORGANIZATIONS:
Appleseed's Leadership & Nonprofit Strategy

The success of Initiative 427 was driven, in large part, by the groundwork and leadership of Nebraska Appleseed, an advocacy organization whose mission is to "fight for justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans" taking a systemic approach to their work. **In every interview we conducted with individuals who contributed to the Medicaid Expansion efforts in Nebraska, the significant role of this organization in the ballot initiative's success was highlighted. Nebraska Appleseed was established in 1996 as a social change legal organization and has more recently added proactive policy advocacy to its repertoire.** Appleseed's early work on Medicaid expansion focused on litigating Medicaid eligibility; as their approach incorporated more policy work, they shifted to engage in policy advocacy around closing gaps in healthcare coverage.

The winning strategy rested on a strong coalition of advocacy organizations and small direct service nonprofits, which engaged their client bases and communities. The coalition also included faith-based organizations, like Omaha Together One Community, a membership-based community organizing nonprofit made up of local Christian congregations, as well as state affiliates of national nonprofits such as Planned Parenthood. **In addition to door knocking and sending postcards, the strategy centered on meeting people where they were—physically, at farmers' markets and other community gathering places, and politically, by framing the issue in ways that spoke to people's everyday experiences.** Nebraska Appleseed, for example, ran educational and storytelling trainings for coalition partners and also collected people's individual stories to understand their healthcare troubles and needs. Kinzie Mabon, Field Director of the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table, expressed:

> *I want to praise Appleseed a million times over. Because it took a while for the campaign to actually get moving—the campaign itself, not the effort. Appleseed really took on the brunt of that work.*

She noted Appleseed's instrumental role in delegating and training coalition partners early on.

Two individuals emerged as activists through the ecosystem undergirding the fight for Medicaid expansion: Amanda Gershon and Kinzie Mabon. Ms. Gershon was a co-sponsor as well as the face of Initiative 427. Her personal story translated the federal policy into a relatable need for health care coverage for Nebraskans. Gershon shared that prior to getting involved in Medicaid expansion she did not consider herself an activist, and explained the seemingly mundane impetus for her activism: "I was frustrated and wrote a letter to the editor of my local newspaper, and they asked me if I was interested in going to the legislative hearing and reading it. And so I did." Her personal story highlighted the harm facing individuals who fell into the health care gap.

KINZIE MABON

I was really sick. I needed health care. At one point, I was working two jobs to pay for prescriptions, and I really needed a lot of testing and surgeries to get better. But by that point, I was only working part-time so I didn't qualify for Medicaid expansion, and I didn't qualify for subsidies because my income was so low. I was angry because I thought the ACA would save my life. I thought once that went through, everything was going to be okay. But then finding out my state opted out really frustrated me.

As summed up by Becky Gould, Executive Director of Nebraska Appleseed:

Amanda, who was one of the Ballot Committee members, was a key partner. She was out collecting signatures too. She continued to talk with other individuals around advocacy, and sharing your stories, and she did press work, and really was a key person in the whole effort.

Kinzie Mabon, the Field Director at the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table, was another important individual whose organizing expertise was honed through her work on Medicaid expansion. Mabon originally came to organizing work through her passion for helping people with felonies on their record register to vote and "participate in the system." Mabon quickly rose up the ladder at the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table, and is responsible for moving their members up the engagement ladder and building the capacity of organizers. For Initiative 427, Mabon held the big-picture strategy for voter and community engagement, looking at the state map and helping to identify where more support was needed across the state. She also collaborated with Appleseed and helped train and provide information to smaller nonprofits new to civic engagement work. **As Zack Burgin, Executive Director of the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table,**

put it, the Medicaid expansion team wanted to develop a new model for organizing, breaking away from political establishment strategies which rely heavily on "consultant culture," and Mabon was a key player in this new model. He noted, "they talked to Kinzie about writing up their very first field plan, developing that for the roll out, for the volunteer collection piece, and then who we were going to mobilize." **As a Black woman, Mabon was also clear to note the important role of BIPOC-led and BIPOC-focused organizations in this effort. She explained that Nebraska is often seen as a homogenous state, but that many counties have growing immigrant and refugee populations, in addition to the existing African American populations in urban centers.** Her organizing leadership guaranteed that these groups were not forgotten in the efforts to expand Medicaid.

The winning strategy rested on a strong coalition of advocacy organizations and small direct service nonprofits, which engaged their client bases and communities.

Strategies for Urban and Rural Counties

The qualification process for getting a ballot initiative onto the ballot in Nebraska requires obtaining a minimum number of signatures proportional to the population in each of the state's 93 counties. As such, **a strategy attuned to the unique concerns and challenges of urban versus rural populations was central to signature collection for qualification, and later for the campaign**. In addition to the different lifestyle considerations that are key to organizing, the urban rural divide also reflects a political divide. As described by Senator Morfeld, "only a third of Nebraskans are registered Democrats… it's a tale of urban versus rural in many cases." This staunch political divide persists, despite the fact that Medicaid expansion stood to benefit rural areas more than urban centers.

The organizing strategies employed in Lincoln and Omaha did not differ greatly from those used in mid-sized cities in other states we analyzed. One notable way in which urban and rural populations were engaged was through power-building using a racial justice lens. In particular, the Heartland Workers Center sought to connect the injustices facing Latinx workers in rural meatpacking plants with the issues facing Black people and other people of color in cities. Ryan Morrissey, Senior Organizer at the Heartland Workers Center, emphasized that these communities are united by the impact of "racial injustice and white supremacy" and also that they lack power. He noted, however, that each campaign provided an opportunity to build power in BIPOC communities, which are growing rapidly in Nebraska. He explained how this looks in their organizing model:

With every Get Out The Vote campaign that we do, increasing the voter turnout is always one of the top goals. But we always have the secondary goals, and I would actually even put them in line with increasing voter turnout, like discovering the issues that affect our communities so that we can go into the next year with the issues that we know is [sic] affecting the community the most. Another huge part of it is finding leaders. If there's someone on the phone with us, and they seem really excited about the work we do, or really excited about the election, we will mark that person as a potential leader. We will do follow-ups with them and get them involved in the Heartland Workers Center work throughout the year. So we definitely have found leaders in past campaigns, including the Medicare expansion, that are still with us today.

There were some key differences in how voters were engaged in rural areas. For example, Brian Depew, Executive Director for the Center for Rural Affairs, noted:

Everybody reads their local newspaper in small towns, still, so it's a good way to reach a traditional rural constituency.

Depew underscored the importance of small, local media outlets for reaching rural voters including daily and weekly newspapers as well as local radio stations.

Trusted messengers were also key to gaining the interest and trust of rural voters. In referring to the qualification process, Gould of Appleseed summed it up eloquently: "Grassroots and volunteer signature collection works. People trust them." **Interviewees mentioned librarians, local elected officials, and volunteers as trusted messengers who were able to successfully connect with rural voters.** For example,
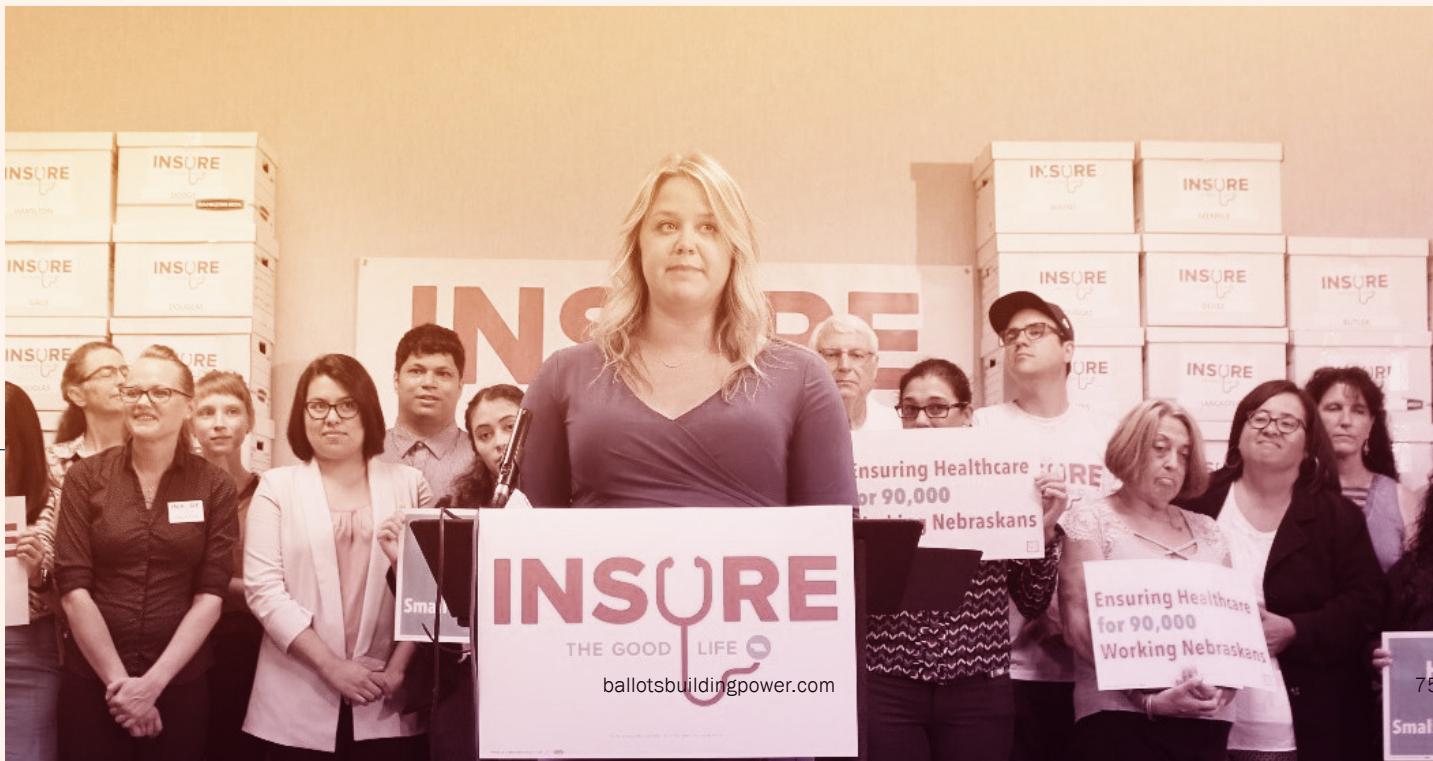
former nursing professor at Creighton University and member of OTOC, Linda Ohri, recounted how her personal networks in Boyd County allowed her to connect with local residents and gather signatures. In particular, her cousin Debbie, who worked as a maintenance person at a local school and was on the County Board, simply "knew everybody." Dr. Ohri noted that in particular, Debbie knew "people who needed Medicaid expansion." Connecting the role of trusted messengers with small, local media, Meg Mandy, the campaign manager for Initiative 427, explained:

> What I learned [in a previous campaign] was about identifying respected leaders in those communities, getting them on your side, getting them to submit letters and op-eds to those papers that people were reading... They really trust their local, small town paper.

Last, the realities of daily life in rural areas may require different approaches to organizing or communications strategies. The Medicaid expansion campaign in Nebraska listened to rural coalition partners in making these key decisions. McCleery reflected on a poignant example:

> We really learned partway through [that] we have to trust what we know to work. And every state is going to be a little bit different. And with that, I think we were able to really help the campaign fill out their staff with local people who had local experience in either working on other initiatives, or local organizers, or who had done local political campaigns, so had some thoughts on like, "Hey, I worked on this campaign before, we did ads just like this. We spent a ton of money on TV ads in this place. Nobody watches TV in western Nebraska at this point because it's harvest season. Nobody's in their house."

This kind of local knowledge was crucial for tailoring campaign strategies and tactics so that they reached rural residents.

KEY MESSAGING & FRAMING:
State Motto for a Conservative Electorate

While the majority of Nebraska's electorate is registered Republicans, Medicaid expansion passed with bipartisan support. Part of its success lies in the framing of the issue. As McCleery explained, **"Our messaging had been tested over the legislative campaigns for so long that we knew what worked and what didn't work."** The campaign for Initiative 427 was dubbed **"Insure the Good Life Campaign,"** a play on the state's slogan, "The Good Life." By tapping into values that resonated with Nebraskans' identity, the campaign sought to bridge any political divisions on the issue. As Senator Morfeld noted, without "a bipartisan appeal, we never would have won." Instead, he stressed the focus on messaging around affordability of healthcare. Another important message that was directed particularly to rural populations was the importance of Medicaid for supporting financially struggling rural hospitals. McCleery emphasized that messaging around caring for communities and families was especially resonant with voters across the state. **By tapping into values around care and quality of life, the campaign was able to appeal to both conservative and progressive voters.**

INSURE
THE GOOD LIFE

By tapping into values that resonated with Nebraskans' identity, the campaign sought to bridge any political divisions on the issue.

Understanding Power-Building Ecosystems

CHALLENGES

Even with the success of Initiative 427, there were challenges along the way. This hard-fought win came with heartache and some powerful lessons.

Racism in Rural Communities

Even with the success of Initiative 427, there were challenges along the way. This hard-fought win came with heartache and some powerful lessons.

Racism in Rural Communities. **Several interviewees reported the racism faced by organizers of color who ventured out from Lincoln or Omaha into rural communities to knock on doors collecting signatures or getting out the vote.** Meg Mikolajczyk, Deputy Director of Legal Counsel at Planned Parenthood, North Central States, explained that as a white woman, she felt open to being sent to rural parts of the state to work on the campaign: "I heard horror stories about anyone of color going outside of Omaha, that it was a nightmare. And I am not surprised." Becky Gould of Appleseed corroborated this statement. Gould described several examples of "overt racism on the ground" and told the story of a Latinx organizer in a rural town:

> He went to one of the doors and the guy said, "You don't want to be in this neighborhood. I'm just giving you a heads up." He was not threatening, he was trying to be helpful. But he [said], "There are people with shotguns and you don't want to experience that." And that really rattled [the organizer], rightfully.

As Gould reflected back, she noted that while they did provide support for navigating such situations, the campaign and coalition partners should have done more to plan and prepare whom they sent where so as not to endanger BIPOC.

Paid Outside Consultants
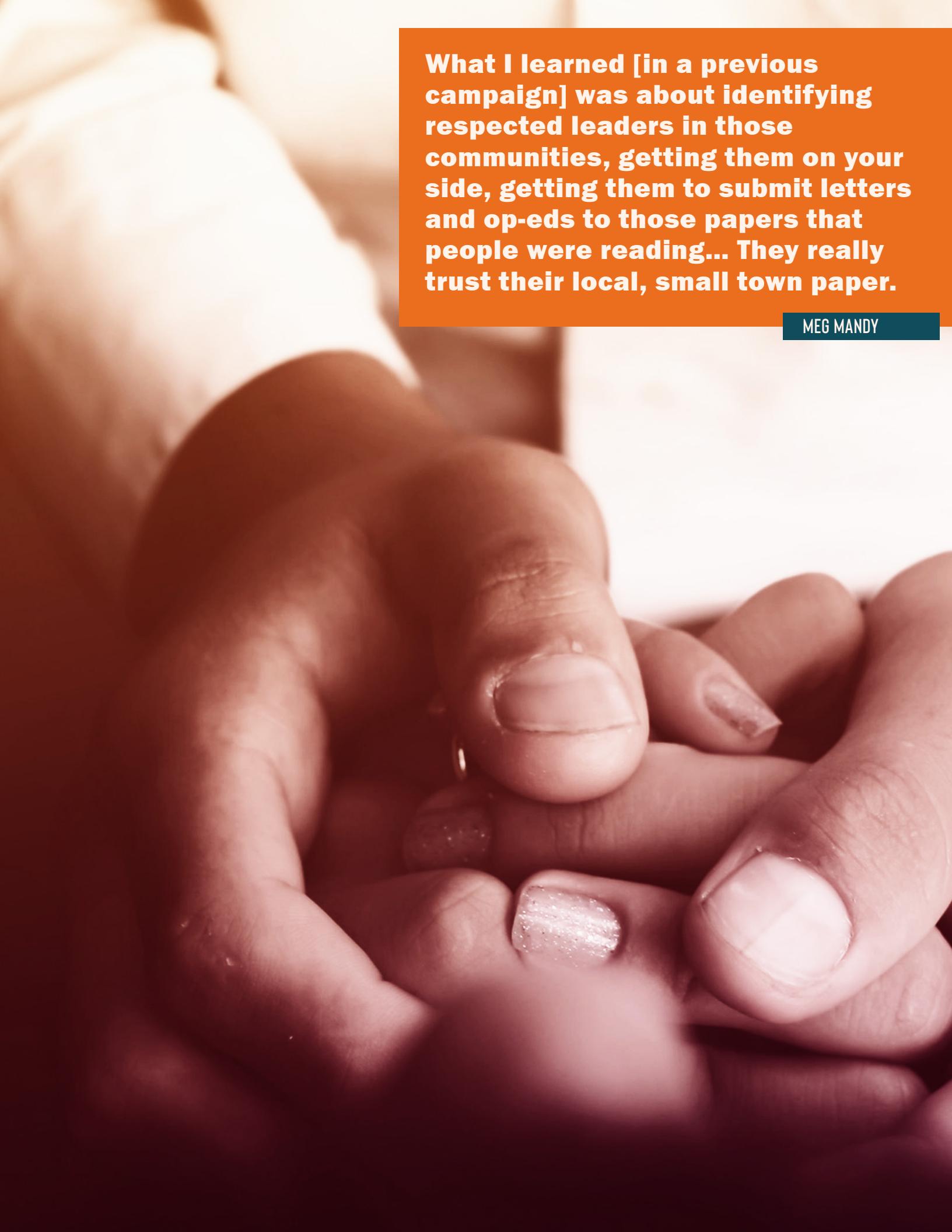
Many interviewees reported negative experiences with paid outside consultants. As one respondent put it, the paid consulting firm that was hired for Initiative 427 represents "the best nightmare." The main complaints are:

1. The parachute model of participating in campaigns
2. That they are notorious for going over budget
3. That issues or conflict arise between paid canvassers and volunteers

As Gould put it:

> Our takeaway was [to] reduce reliance on paid firms—[They are] super expensive, much more of a mercenary approach. We spent way more time than we wanted to navigating people's frustrations with the way they were behaving in the community.

Instead, organizations are looking to invest in local capacity to build the skills needed to accomplish these goals without the support of paid outside consultants. To be sure, paid consultants saw their role differently. As Lewis Granofsky, a partner at FieldWorks—the firm hired to support the signature collection for Initiative 427—articulated, **"part of our model was built specifically to work with organizations and groups on the ground and make room for them and coordinate with them instead of competing with them."**

What I learned [in a previous campaign] was about identifying respected leaders in those communities, getting them on your side, getting them to submit letters and op-eds to those papers that people were reading... They really trust their local, small town paper.

MEG MANDY

MEDICAID EXPANSION MOBILIZES STATES

MONTANA

Medicaid expansion was brought to Montana voters via Ballot Initiative 185 (I-185) in 2018 with the hopes of cementing the policy's future in the state. Montana had previously expanded Medicaid through the legislative process in 2015, but the policy included a sunset clause with an end date of June 30, 2019. Advocates for I-185 hoped to bypass the legislature and a new potential sunset date, by bringing the vote directly to voters with the "Extend Medicaid Expansion and Increase Tobacco Taxes Initiative." As indicated by the ballot initiative's title, Medicaid expansion was paired with a tobacco tax, which would be used in part to fund Medicaid. Unfortunately, the ballot initiative was not successful, receiving only 47.30% of the vote. Had the initiative passed, it would have extended Medicaid expansion with no new sunset date and imposed a tax on tobacco products in order to fund Medicaid expansion programs and other health-related programs. Though Medicaid expansion did not pass as a ballot initiative, it was passed legislatively in 2019 with a new sunset date of 2025 and with new work-related restrictions as well as higher premiums for expansion enrollees.

Organizational Support for I-185

With the passage of the Affordable Care Act, and the subsequent Supreme Court decision that states could opt into Medicaid expansion, a coalition formed in 2012 because they knew it "was going to be an uphill battle in Montana" as stated by SJ Howell. Howell is the Executive Director of Montana Women Vote, an advocacy organization serving low-income women and families across Montana. That coalition successfully expanded Medicaid in their state through the state legislature in 2015, but progressive organizations as well as the Democratic Governor at the time, Steve Bullock, were concerned about the prospects of Medicaid expansion's renewal with the Republican controlled state legislature. Once it was decided that a ballot initiative would be the best approach, it was paired with a tobacco tax. **Rich Rasmussen, CEO of the Montana Hospital Association, explained that a tobacco tax was paired with Medicaid expansion to fund the program because I-185 organizational supporters such as the American Heart Association or the Cancer Society were "really anti-tobacco," and because Montana had not raised taxes on tobacco in years.**

Advocacy organizations supported I-185 in large part because of the health benefits to Montanans. Interviewees representing organizations ranging from the Hospital Association to Western Native Voice expressed the importance of Medicaid expansion to their communities. Beyond the health benefits, some interviewees shared an intersectional and anti-racist analysis for their efforts to pass I-185. Howell, for example, noted that supporting Medicaid expansion was part of Montana Women Vote's broader health

equity goals, including **"folks who experience barriers to health care, including living in poverty, living in a rural part of the state, being indigenous, being LGBTQ."** Garrett Lankford, a former organizer with the Montana Human Rights Network, emphasized the advocacy organization's use of a human rights framework to address various issues, including LGBTQ rights, white supremacy, and health care.

> ## We really learned partway through [that] we have to trust what we know to work. And every state is going to be a little bit different.
>
> ### MOLLY MCCLEERY

Lankford noted the entry point for the Montana Human Rights Network to work on Medicaid expansion was a way to combat white nationalism and anti-Semitism. He explained further:

> There's a large and active white nationalist and white supremacist movement. Sometimes they're separate, sometimes they overlap. And one of their main goals in Montana, and throughout the United States, is to make sure that government and democracy only functions for those who are white males, cis-het white males... And so through our research, we noticed that a lot of times their recruiting techniques were on political issues that weren't quite as icky. You can justify opposition to Medicaid expansion a lot easier than you can justification [oppression based] on someone's race. They use these policy areas as recruiting tools. And so that was our key.

Organizational actors in Montana clearly perceive the interconnected nature of health care access to systems of oppression and used these lenses in their efforts to pass I-185.

GARRETT LANKFORD

Indigenous Health, Native Sovereignty, and Tobacco Use

Attunement to the interests of sovereign Native nations and to indigenous cultural practices in Montana was an important element that shaped some campaign concerns. Central to the goal of Medicaid expansion was the importance of this program in serving Native communities. Amanda Frickle, Director of Montana Voices, which is a statewide civic engagement project, pointed out that because Montana's indigenous communities benefit from Medicaid, they have a "vested interest" in ensuring the program's continuation. Others, like Ta'jin Perez, echoed this sentiment. Perez is the Deputy Director of Western Native Voice, Montana's only statewide advocacy and organizing-focused organization working with tribal nations. Perez asserted, **"One of our top priorities is health and safety for communities, understanding that tribal nations and Native American folks face large disparities in health care and health outcomes."**

While the benefits of Medicaid expansion were fairly straightforward for tribal nations and Indigenous people, the tobacco tax proved to be more complicated. Western Native Voice works regularly with tribal governments to discuss and strategize around current events and policy. One piece of building support among tribal governments was to explain the implications of the tobacco tax and assure them that **the tax would not apply to their sovereign nations**. The second challenge around the tobacco tax was the confusion around which tobacco products would be taxed. This concern was particularly important because of tobacco's importance and usage in Indigenous ceremony. Perez explained that Western Native Voice's team of organizers' biggest task was to educate Native communities about the details of the ballot initiative, specifically around these questions of tobacco's use in traditional ceremony:

> *With the tobacco tax initiative, one of the things that was incredibly important was to educate communities. At first, there was a misconception. Because tobacco is an important part of ceremony for many tribal nations and tribal traditions, there needed to be special education and messaging on, "This is [a tax on] commercial tobacco," dispelling how this tax would not be levied within tribal nations, because that [was] not the purview of it.*

For Perez, education around the specific impacts on Native communities was key to building community support.

KEY MESSAGING & FRAMING:
Reactionary Messaging to Big Tobacco

One tricky component of I-185 was how to message a ballot initiative that proposed two separate policies: a tobacco tax and Medicaid expansion. Questions around messaging and framing the campaign needed to account for the best approach to the disparate issues. Heather O'Loughlin, Co-Director of the Montana Budget and Policy Center, surmised that the two distinct issues "ended up confusing voters a fair amount."

Several respondents noted that early on, the campaign was on the defensive, needing to respond to Big Tobacco's campaign against the ballot initiative. Not only did they find themselves in a position of having to defend or reframe the conversation around the tax, but also they were fighting misinformation spread by the tobacco industry. As Frickle put it, the opposition was inaccurate: "It was not necessarily based on facts." Ella Smith, Program Director for Montana Women Vote, specified that the disinformation campaign by the tobacco industry focused on framing the ballot initiative as an unfunded mandate and questioning its constitutionality.

To combat this framing by the tobacco industry, organizers took several approaches. First, many respondents described a strategy of shifting conversations with potential supporters from taxation to a focus on the benefits of Medicaid expansion. Smith detailed Montana Women Vote's approach:

Our main message was: the amount of people who rely on Medicaid expansion and the amount of time that it has been since we've raised the tobacco tax in Montana. With a sub message of how raising the tobacco tax does decrease smoking, based on a variety of different studies. So those were sort of our main messages... We really did try to focus on Medicaid expansion and the benefits to the tobacco tax, to a tobacco tax raise... We tried to do our best in terms of conversations around regressive taxes, which, especially for Montana Women Vote being a low-income focused organization, is particularly difficult within our constituency.

Smith noted that they likely lost some potential supporters due to the complicated implications of the tax on low-income voters. Similarly, Western Native Voice focused their messaging on the benefits of Medicaid expansion. Perez recalled:

We talked a lot about Medicaid expansion and how it was important to preserve it. We have seen that since 2015, health outcomes have improved, primarily through referrals that have been made from Indian Health Service to other, non-Native health centers. Not only did those referrals increase, but the types of services also have changed or shifted, even within a year of passage in 2015.

CHALLENGES

Conservative State

Several respondents noted that Montana being (at the time) a purple state posed several challenges for I-185. First, many maintained the population's general aversion to new taxes; conservatives and small business owners opposed the tax, as did progressives who acknowledged the impact of a regressive tax on poor individuals. In addition, Republican legislators who were up for reelection and who had previously voted for Medicaid expansion in 2015 were reluctant to support I-185 publicly, despite the fact that it was a popular program in the state. The climate for Republicans to support such legislation under the Trump administration, it was feared, would negatively impact Republican candidates' electability. Last, Rasmussen noted a unique challenge with conservative media not airing the I-185 campaign ads:

> *One very large media organization did not run our advertisements in the last few weeks of the campaign, unbeknownst to us. We purchased time. And it was a significant buy in Montana standards— over $100,000 in media buy—and in communities where we needed to be strengthen ourselves and push through. And here we are five months after the event and during the reconciliations, and we were remitted over $100,000 because this media company chose not to run the ads. Again, we didn't know that. We thought our ads were running. So very conservative media companies that own local broadcast outlets, we need to be sensitive to that because someone needs to really watch very closely to ensure that what you're buying is actually getting on the air.*

These various challenges are important lessons for running ballot initiatives campaigns in contexts that are politically less advantageous.

Big Tobacco

By running a ballot initiative that merged Medicaid expansion with a sustained way to pay for the program with a tobacco tax, the campaign invited Big Tobacco's opposition. These proved to be the biggest blow to the campaign; 100% of individuals interviewed who worked to pass I-185 raised the issue of combining the two issues as a challenge and lesson for future campaigns. Amanda Cahill, Government Relations Director of the American Heart Association in Montana and North Dakota, recalled, "Medicaid expansion polled really well, and so did the tobacco tax," but also explained:

> *Marrying [Medicaid expansion and a tobacco tax] can sometimes create an opportunity for the tobacco companies to come in and really create confusion and draw false parallels. One of their big tactics was saying this is an unfunded mandate to require Medicaid expansion, and that the tobacco tax wouldn't cover it, which was untrue. But [it was] a really, really good talking point that they just blasted out there and beat us up on.*

Others, like Frickle, mentioned the fear of big tobacco entering the debate because of the money they could throw behind the opposition. Because the initiative had two policy components, the I-185 campaign and coalition partners were tasked with developing a clear framing of a complicated ballot initiative, and also combatting the disinformation campaign being spread effectively by the opposition.

Timeline

Part of I-185's challenges in confronting the opposition was related to its rushed timeline. Several interviewees mentioned that they were behind on spreading their framing of the issues to voters. Beyond messaging, building out the organizational infrastructure of the campaign was also slow. Rasmussen explained, "We brought in someone to run the organization, to run the initiative, who was a past democratic lawmaker, very gifted. They helped to bring some support and some guardrails around this so we could move forward. I believe had we done this earlier, we would have passed the initiative. But we were late in the game." **Having ample timing is important for any ballot initiative campaign, but it is especially important for campaigns facing strong opposition so they can get their messaging out early, and develop a strong ground game strategy.**

Pay to Play Model

While organizations like Montana Women Vote, the Montana Human Rights Network and Western Native Voice were crucial to the organizing and field game that took place on the ground in communities across the state to gain support for I-185, the decision-makers behind the campaign were the larger well-resourced advocacy organizations, such as the Montana Hospital Association, the Primary Care Association, and the American Cancer Society. Cahill explained, **"There was a buy-in situation for being one of the major decision makers [for the I-185 campaign]. I forget the number of thousands of dollars you needed to contribute. There were probably like seven of us in our circle of decision making."**

The pay-to-play model was raised as problematic by a national partner that joined the coalition late in the game. Jonathan Schleifer, Executive Director of the Fairness Project based in Washington, D.C., noted that he had a hard time recalling the coalition partners for I-185 in Montana. This, he explained, was a failure on his organization's part, to get involved in a campaign such that they were not working closely enough with organizations on the ground:

> I can tell you almost all of our partners in Oklahoma and Missouri or Idaho. The fact that I cannot do it from Montana speaks to the role that we did not want to have in that state. It was sort of an experiment for us: could we come in late on the invitation of a political person without the resources to have a real vote in a way that we'd want to? And ultimately the answer for us was no. We would not replicate that model again.

Big players like national organizations are not the only ones who lose under a pay-to-play model. This approach typically leaves out the voices and needs of those most marginalized or directly impacted by the issue at hand, because the organizations that represent these communities typically are smaller and less-resourced.

SUCCESSES:
Raising Awareness and Medicaid Expansion Renewed through the Legislature

While the "Extend Medicaid Expansion and Increase Tobacco Taxes Initiative" failed before voters, interviewees still reported two clear wins. First, they were able to build power for the 2019 legislative vote on the issue. Smith commented that by educating voters on Medicaid expansion, they created enough momentum to pressure the legislature:

> *We did obviously suffer an overall loss in terms of the campaign, however, [we also had] the opportunity to have conversations about health care in Montana and build power around Medicaid expansion. We did pass Medicaid expansion in 2019 in the legislative session, and I would argue that that may not have been possible without the power built that happened during the campaign. There were a lot of messages to the legislature, particularly to swing votes in that 2019 legislative session, and on a lot larger of a scale than what we had seen in the past. I remember standing in the gallery and seeing just stacks of paper on particularly the seven Republicans who were identified as potential swing votes, just stacks of messages on the policy.*

Second, as stated above, Medicaid expansion was renewed, albeit with new restrictions, through the state legislature. The knowledge and interest in the issue that the campaign created helped pressure elected officials to pass the legislation.

In addition, the ballot initiative process allowed organizations to address the gap between the desires of their members, voters, and communities and the willingness of politicians to vote for popular legislation that falls out of step with the party line. Howell, of Montana Women Vote, explained the power and different usages of ballot initiatives succinctly:

> *We have engaged in initiative efforts really since the beginning of the organization. Sometimes those efforts are really just about sort of voter education: here's what's on your ballot, and here's how to understand the initiative. In other cases, like with I-185, and several other initiatives over the years, we've taken a much more in depth role. I think we've seen the initiative process be a really important way that we can address issues that face structural barriers in the state legislature, but still enjoy wide support among voters.*

POWER-BUILDING ASSESSMENT:
Medicaid Expansion

Table 4. Medicaid Expansion Campaigns Power-Building Assessment

OUTCOMES		
METRIC	**Yes/No**	**DETAILS**
Newly activated individuals	**NE: Yes** **MT: No**	Nebraska effectively brought in new advocates such as Amanda Gershon who became a member of the Ballot Committee and Rich Blocker who single-handedly collected 3,000 signatures for the Medicaid expansion initiative. Nebraska Appleseed also grew their base from 1,500 to 5,000 through the Medicaid expansion campaign. In contrast, activating individuals did not seem to be a core part of Montana's I-185 campaign strategy.
New voters or communities participating in electoral politics	**NE: Yes** **MT: Somewhat**	The Nebraska Civic Engagement Table focused on mobilizing BIPOC-led and BIPOC-focused nonprofits and advocacy organizations to mobilize Black and Latinx voters. The campaign also followed the leadership of the Center for Rural Affairs and volunteers from rural counties to mobilize constituents living in rural areas. In Montana, Western Native Voice reported that every election cycle, they see greater participation from Native voters. However, with I-185, we also saw how the tobacco tax deterred some Native voters from supporting the initiative.
New organizations/programs	**No**	Respondents did not share information about establishing new organizations or programs for this campaign.
New networks, coalitions or organizing relationships	**Yes**	In Nebraska, the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table recruited the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the League of Women Voters, Planned Parenthood, the Heartland Workers Center, the Center for Rural Affairs, Civic Nebraska, the Health Center Association of Nebraska, the Institute for Public Leadership, and the Brain Injury Alliance and helped them use Medicaid expansion to mobilize and organize their bases. Nebraska Appleseed also solidified itself as a hub for organizing nonprofits. In Montana, the Hospital Association leveraged its network to carry out the campaign.

Table 4 presents an evaluation of both Medicaid expansion campaigns in terms of power-building. It also provides a comparison of the two and highlights some of the ways in which Nebraska's Insure the Good Life campaign built more power than Montana's I-185 campaign.

OUTCOMES

METRIC	Yes/No	DETAILS
New funders	Yes	The Fairness Project and Families USA supported both campaigns financially for the first time.
New audience or increased attention	Yes	Both campaigns caught the attention of national organizations who believed they had the potential to be successful, and Nebraska's campaign also appealed to more conservative voters, which is a new audience for an issue that is typically thought of as progressive.
New access to decision making	NE: Somewhat MT: No	In Nebraska, Amanda Gershon who was directly impacted by the health insurance coverage gap became a leader on the campaign and a Ballot Committee member, but overall people's existing relationships to decision-making remained the same. In Montana, advocacy organizations and hospital providers were the major decision-makers which did not create new access.
New positional power for communities that have been traditionally marginalized	No	In Nebraska, elected officials called most of the shots, with Senator Kathy Campbell as the primary decision-maker on the Ballot Committee, Senator Adam Morfeld as the primary liaison with funders, and Nebraska Appleseed and the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table leveraging their existing power. In Montana, the campaign used a pay-to-play model, which gave the majority of the decision-making power to 7 organizations that were able to make significant financial contributions.

Table 4. Medicaid Expansion Campaigns Power-Building Assessment, *continued*

PROCESSES		
METRIC	**Yes/No**	**DETAILS**
New frameworks or narratives in explaining an issue	**NE: Yes** **MT: No**	Nebraska's campaign adopted the banner of "Insure the Good Life", a play on their state slogan, which seemed to resonate with voters. In Montana, the campaign's inability to frame the tobacco tax in a way that worked for Native people and voters on the far left harpooned their success.
New organizing models, strategies or tactics	**Somewhat**	Nebraska Appleseed rolled out a volunteer-driven distributed organizing model, which helped grow their base during this campaign. In Montana, organizations partnered with national strategists, which was helpful for kicking off the campaign, but too far removed from the ground to build significant power.
Expanding know-how to new groups around ballot initiative or other civic engagement processes	**NE: Yes** **MT: Somewhat**	Nebraska Appleseed held trainings on signature collection and collaborated with the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table to lead storytelling trainings, educate smaller nonprofits, and encourage organizations to see themselves as advocates. In Montana, Western Native Voice described training organizers and developing new leaders, however, civic engagement knowledge-sharing was not something we heard emphasized by other groups.

Table 4. Medicaid Expansion Campaigns Power-Building Assessment, *continued*

PROCESSES		
METRIC	**Yes/No**	**DETAILS**
Community has autonomy and agency throughout the campaign	**No**	In Nebraska, the campaign focused more on capacity building and leadership development than creating processes that put community members in leadership positions. Montana's campaign took a more top-down approach that gave larger, well-resourced organizations control over decision-making, which did not facilitate community control.
Community knowledge is respected in the process	**Somewhat**	The individuals who were activated through Nebraska's campaign sang Appleseed and OTOC's praises for how respected and valued they felt. This did not necessarily transfer into large-scale community influence, but it does signify that community knowledge and input was valued. In Montana, the campaign did not seem to focus its energy on uplifting community knowledge, but it did defer to culturally specific groups such as Western Native Voice. Montana Women Vote also has an advisory board made up of people who live across the state, which suggests that there is respect for community knowledge.
Campaigns are accountable to community members	**No**	Respondents did not share information about mechanisms to prioritize community accountability.

TAKEAWAYS FOR POWER-BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING MEDICAID ORGANIZING ECOSYSTEMS

A Grassroots Relational Approach Builds More Power

The Medicaid expansion case studies provide an interesting juxtaposition between two different approaches to advancing the same issue. Strong partnerships in Nebraska gave the campaign a wide reach and facilitated a successful grassroots volunteer signature collection drive. Their relational organizing approach also activated new advocates and organizers and built power by bringing in new people. Montana's campaign took a more top-down approach that utilized a pay to play model and was more influenced by national organizations and wealthy health care associations. Ultimately, pairing Medicaid expansion with a tobacco tax turned off voters on both sides of the aisle and disrupted some of the ecosystem's power-building potential.

A Ground Game with Local Knowledge

Initiative 427 was spearheaded by an organization with a deep understanding of Nebraskans' concerns and strong connections to a network of organizations. This locally rooted coalition meant that they could adapt their campaign strategies and tactics, and move away from a one size fits all model. I-185 had heavier lifting to do because the ballot initiative covered two issues; their ability to effectively educate potential voters and address the unique concerns of Native people and tribal nations around the tobacco tax was key to gaining support from these communities.

Trusting Local Knowledge and Capacity

The campaign and coalition of organizations working on the Insure the Good Life Campaign successfully took into account the knowledge of their communities' worldview and lived experience to shape organizing strategies and tactics. Trusting local knowledge affords adaptability in the face of one-size-fits-all strategies that are often brought in by outside experts.

Centering Narratives of Directly Impacted

Nebraska's campaign was successful in activating newly engaged voters and advocates because of its personal one-to-one approach and its centering of personal stories. This approach humanized what might otherwise be perceived as bland federal policy.

Building BIPOC Power

While Nebraska is viewed as a largely racially homogenous, white state, a racial justice lens connects the challenges of rural BIPOC communities to those faced by urban BIPOC communities.

Protecting BIPOC Organizers

It is important to anticipate the ways in which racism (or other forms of bias or discrimination) could arise in the day-to-day work of campaigns and organizing and, to the extent possible, shield BIPOC from these traumatic experiences by not putting them in harm's way.

Funding and Timelines Matter
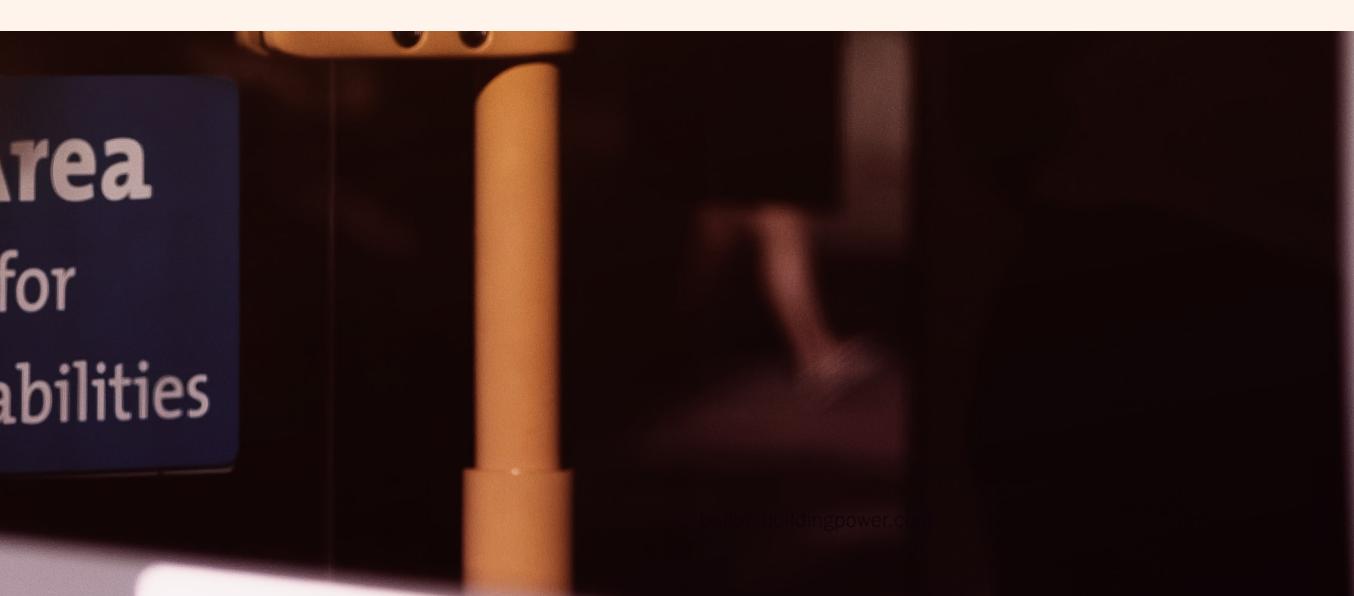
Despite their win, interviewees in Nebraska noted the rushed timeline and the late push for funding both at national and local levels. Having partners like Senator Morfeld, who could leverage his networks for funding was crucial. More time and more funding earlier on in the process would have allowed more time during the campaign to be devoted to strategy and organizing. In Montana, the rush to set up the organizational infrastructure of the campaign and get ahead of the tobacco industry's messaging proved fatal to the ballot initiative.

Anticipating the Opposition

The experience of playing a reactionary role in messaging against the well-funded and early messaging by tobacco companies was the defining challenge to the I-185 campaign. Getting ahead of the opposition's message is a key takeaway. Doing so requires having resources early to combat opposition with deep pockets.

Organizing in an Unfavorable Political Context

In addition to nonpartisan or tailored messaging that appeals to people with divergent political leanings, several other concerns arise in politically hostile environments. The Montana case reveals the role of conservative media gatekeeping messaging from reaching potential voters and the constraints of an election cycle in which politicians up for reelection are reluctant to support an issue that falls out of step with the party platform. Though I-185 (though only by a few percentage points), ballot initiatives can be a key way to give power to voters when their elected officials will not vote in accordance with popular opinion on the issue—as was the case in Nebraska, which had tried for years to pass Medicaid expansion through the unicameral state legislature.

Multiple Issues Complicate Messaging

Particularly when dealing with policies that can be intricate and hard to understand, combining multiple issues poses challenges to messaging and framing a campaign issue. One way to combat this challenge may be to refrain from combining issues into one ballot measure if the framing and narrative around the issue becomes too complex. An additional solution is to center the stories of real people, to give a face and narrative to the policy.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM BUILT POWER AT THE BALLOT

FLORIDA

In 2018, Floridians voted to re-enfranchise an estimated 1.4 million returning citizens, or formerly incarcerated individuals with felony convictions on their record. Amendment 4, also known as the "Voting Rights Restoration for Felons Initiative" passed with 64.55% of the vote. This amendment to the Florida State Constitution restored the right to vote to returning citizens with felony records (with the exception of those with murder and sex-offense convictions) upon completion of all terms of their sentence, including probation and parole. Unfortunately, there has been an ongoing legal battle over whether paying fines and fees is required before people with prior felony convictions are eligible to vote, which has led to confusion and lower voter registration rates than expected. This reform directly impacts who can participate in electoral politics, which also creates new avenues for community power-building and widespread relationship-building proved to be pivotal for the campaign's success.

This fight for voting rights offers multiple lessons. It provides important insights into a long-game strategy and demonstrates how grassroots champions can build a movement as well as a successful political campaign. It uncovers the tensions between the expertise of directly impacted communities and traditional civic engagement practices and assumptions about campaign success. It also demonstrates how and why leadership by returning citizens and Black and Brown women can lead to transformative wins.

Building Power through the Leadership of Directly Impacted People

Amendment 4, first named the "Let My People Vote" campaign and later the "Second Chances" campaign, grew out of the movement to restore the vote to returning citizens. **The campaign and movement are the direct result of the diligent and brilliant work of those most directly impacted by Florida's restrictive law banning the right to vote for life after a felony conviction.** In spite of returning citizens' inability to vote, they were able to mount an impressive ground game and pull together a powerful coalition that ultimately led to the passage of Amendment 4.

> ## Those that are closest to the pain are often those that are closest to the solution.
>
> ### DESMOND MEADE

The amendment had its allegory in the personal story of Desmond Meade who became the face of the campaign. He is the President and Executive Director of the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRC), a grassroots membership organization run by people with prior convictions that aims to end disenfranchisement and discrimination against people with convictions and create a more humane process for people returning from prison. Meade explained, "Of course, what my organization is known for is being the primary organization that led the effort in Florida around a constitutional citizens initiative to re-enfranchise approximately 1.4 million Floridians." This work was personal for Meade, who recounted:

The journey that led me to work on Amendment 4 came from my personal experience as a returning citizen, as someone who had been formally convicted of a felony offense. Back in 2005, I actually found myself standing in front of railroad tracks, waiting on the train to come so I could jump in front of it. I was homeless, recently released from prison, unemployed, and didn't see any light at the end of the tunnel. But fortunately, that train didn't come that day. And I was able to cross those tracks into a new way of life.

FRRC was established prior to Meade's involvement as a coalition project led by the ACLU of Florida. Meade joined in 2006 and was elected as Secretary for the Steering Committee. This experience, he explained, helped him learn the ins and outs of organizing around voter disenfranchisement. It also allowed him to connect with important national and local organizations working on the issue.

My job was to take notes and prepare minutes from previous meetings. We had monthly coalition calls talking about felon disenfranchisement and different strategies in addressing that. I would be on each of those calls. On those calls would be some of the top people in the world that have studied felon disenfranchisement or been involved in advocacy around it. You had Mark Mauer from the Sentencing Project and his crew; the Brennan Center for justice and Myrna Pérez and their crew; the ACLU National, ACLU local; the NAACP national and local, and many others—like the Florida League of Women Voters, and so many other small organizations. While everyone else got a one hour call, I would get eight hours because I would record the calls, and in order for me to transcribe the minutes, I have to keep on rewinding and playing,

rewinding and playing, rewinding and playing. I basically just had an overload of information about this issue. And so eventually in, around 2008, I was approached and asked to be the Interim President of this coalition and I accepted.

Meade was the first directly impacted person in a leadership role at FRRC. In 2011 when the coalition fractured, he remained at the helm and began to build out his vision of an organization of returning citizens.

DESMOND MEADE

While this issue and campaign have been Meade's life's work, many individuals have been activated through this work. Valencia Gunder is another person who has been directly impacted by incarceration who became deeply committed and involved in the efforts to re-franchise returning citizens. She recounted how the Amendment 4 Campaign ignited her interest and involvement. When she initially started working for the New Florida Majority, she hid her past experience with the criminal justice system, and shared how meeting Desmond helped her embrace this part of her identity: **"I met Desmond Meade at the organization, and Desmond's big-mouthed self said loudly 'Aren't you a returning citizen?'" Gunder said she responded, "Chill out, my boss is right here." She thought she would lose her job; instead, a colleague reassured her, "That's not what the New Florida Majority stands for. Here in this space, you can be safe."** Through this experience, Gunder began to see the value in integrating and sharing her understanding of the criminal justice system into her organizing. "That was the first time I ever felt liberated to tell anybody about my experience," she recalled. Getting involved with Amendment 4 was something of a calling for Gunder. She remembered thinking, "'This is something I need to be doing,' even though I was there as the climate organizer. I [thought], 'This is everybody's work.'"

Whether providing resources, expertise, or time, Black women were, in many ways, the backbone of this success story.

The Amendment 4 campaign was an effort led by and for directly impacted people, with many grassroots coalition partners. Organizers with deep ties to their communities educated people about the history of racism, white supremacy, and the history of voting rights. They held events at college campuses, in Black and Brown communities, knocked on doors, and brought in new voters. When asked to reflect on the role of directly impacted individuals, Meade shared:

> *The role of formerly incarcerated or convicted people, not only in this campaign, but in movement is so critical. When you look particularly at our Amendment 4 campaign, you couldn't get any more close and personal, because guess what? I was the chair of the committee. And basically, it was my vision that caused us to even go down this path. It was my leadership that led us from start to finish. I've got to brag a little bit. This is the largest victory in the history of Florida as it relates to civil rights, and it was led by an African American man who was formerly incarcerated and convicted.*
>
> *And guess what? I'm not an anomaly, because you've seen over the last four years that some of the biggest ballot initiative victories in this country around voting rights were actually led by formerly incarcerated and convicted people in Louisiana— the unanimous jury amendment that successfully passed—in California Prop 17 that extended voting rights to people on parole successfully passed. Those were led by formerly incarcerated people, which speaks to the adage that we've used for so many years, "Those that are closest to the pain are often those that are closest to the solution." And I can tell you that the people who are experiencing the pain have more investment in ending the pain than anybody else.*

The Hidden Role of Black Women

While Desmond Meade was a strong and impactful leader for the movement to re-enfranchise returning citizens and for the Amendment 4 campaign, Black women executed much of the organizing behind the scenes. **As Gladys Washington put it, "When it comes to race, when you're talking about mostly Black-led organizations—because those are the ones that are doing the significant civic engagement work that could potentially lead to things like a ballot initiative and electoral change—[they] are Black-led and mostly female-led in the South."** Whether providing resources, expertise, or time, Black women were, in many ways, the backbone of this success story. The role of Black women in the campaign begins with Desmond Meade's own family. His wife, Sheena Meade, is a former union organizer who brought her skills and knowledge from that work to FRRC, serving as the organization's Director of Organizing and Strategic Partnerships. She also sat on the steering committee for Amendment 4. According to Reverend Sheena Rolle, who contracted with FRRC towards the end of the campaign to support their community engagement efforts, uplifted this saying: "What bolstered [Desmond Meade's] ability to [push for a constitutional amendment] was marrying his wife, Sheena Meade, who had been a union leader in the state of Florida for many years."

Other Black women who were central leaders to the campaign included Reverend Rhonda Thomas, Reverend Sheena Rolle, and Itohan Ighodaro, among many others. Thomas explained her role in leading the campaign work with faith communities through her organization, Faith in Florida:

In 2018, I led the statewide Let My People Vote campaign around Amendment 4. It was really two separate hats. I was the Deputy Director for Faith in Florida, and then during that campaign period, Faith in Florida and Florida Rights Restoration Coalition came together and created a campaign, Let My People Vote, where it targeted a large percentage of the faith community. I became the statewide campaign manager over that space of work... It was just a phenomenal space to be in. I've learned so much and engaged so many people that continue to work with me today.

Thomas bridged FRRC's campaign goals with those of the faith communities she served. **Beyond facilitating this important partnership, she built power by forming new connections, noting that she continues to work with many individuals she encountered through work on Amendment 4 and sees them as family.**

SHEENE ROLLE

Sheena Rolle brought nearly two decades of expertise to the campaign. She first began working on voting rights restoration as an organizer with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) in 2006. She noted that prior to working for FRRC, she had worked on several projects that opened the path for the issue to become a ballot initiative. She explained, "I eventually was contracted by FRRC the last couple months of the 2018 election to help with their organizers, both from FRRC as well as Faith in Florida, to push the Amendment over the edge with their community engagement." Rolle explained how the campaign engaged in building relationships:

> My primary role was to work with their local organizers to not only do community events to help pull in voters, to pull in the community and the voters attached to returning citizens, [but also] to address the culture of disenfranchisement. In order to impact some of that, we did a lot of community initiatives, peer-to-peer outreach, direct relational organizing, to pull in people, rally them, get their excitement, and then push them out to vote for their community and family members who are disenfranchised.

Rolle asserted the importance of understanding that "one person's disenfranchisement dampens the likelihood" of others in their community voting and that the organizing around Amendment 4 required building a culture of voting in these impacted communities.

Itohan Ighodaro, served as the State Grassroots Director for Amendment 4. She was responsible for coordinating with coalition partner organizations, and particularly involved in supporting organizations' petition collection and campaign messaging. As she stated:

> My role was working with the state and national organizations that wanted to be involved to form a coalition. Part of that was getting those organizations in the coalition to commit to the petition gathering effort and also walking them through the process and work and motivating them to reach their goal and supporting them in that effort.

Ighodaro has gone on to found Hard Knocks Strategies, her own voter engagement and mobilization organization in Florida. In this case, power-building looks like a newly established, Black woman-led organization that is a part of Florida's civic engagement ecosystem.

The importance of the role that Black women played in this campaign is not simply that they worked hard to achieve this win, but that they brought invaluable insights, abilities to connect to the community, and innovative approaches to civic engagement and organizing. As Rolle put it:

> It was Black women. It was the Black Women's Roundtable and the Florida Coalition for Black Civic Participation that started to say, "We'll collect the petitions." It was a Black woman, Sheena Meade, who said, "I will be the field strategist. I don't technically work for this organization, but I will be the field strategist because I understand how this leads to liberation for my family." Black women from the grassroots to grasstops and all in between. And that has really been the driving force behind the kind of amazingness of the glory of the win.

The results surpass the success of Amendment 4, with new organizational connections emerging, new communities and voters becoming civically engaged, and consultants and experts in the field of civic engagement work forging new paths. All of these feats amount to building power in Florida.

KEY MESSAGING & FRAMING:
Bipartisanship and the Official & Unofficial Campaign Messages

To win at the ballot, a constitutional amendment in Florida requires at least 60% of the vote. As a result, it was important for the campaign to ensure that messaging appealed to conservative and liberal voters alike. **While the campaign centered the voices of returning citizens and was led by directly impacted people on the ground, big decisions around things like messaging were left to the steering committee, which largely excluded the voices of those closest to the pain.** Andrea Mercado, executive director of New Florida Majority (now Florida Rising) explained: "I was the only woman of color that was part of the steering committee besides Sheena Meade, Desmond's wife. And I learned a lot about the ways that donors use their resources to try to control messaging and engagement strategies."

The official messaging of the Amendment 4 campaign was nonpartisan and focused on returning citizens deserving a second chance. Chris Melody Fields Figueredo, Executive Director of the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center (BISC), emphasized the importance of finding alignment or the "value center" of an issue when multiple stakeholders are at play. She noted that

the goal in Florida was "to find the values messaging where everyone is aligned. Second chances was one of those. Everyone in the state agreed, you deserve a second chance. When a debt is paid, a debt is paid. Black, White, Brown, Latinx...they all could see that value center. And finding that value center was really critical to bring folks around."

While this messaging welcomed a broad swath of voters, organizers also tailored messaging to resonate with their communities. For example, Reverend Thomas noted that her team reached out to faith communities "regardless of denomination" and emphasized that this issue was "a moral thing," that it was "the right thing to do." She was able to convince 800 different congregations across the state, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim to commit to discussing the moral impetus of Amendment 4 in their communities through doorknocking, phonebanking, and generally raising awareness. For example, she highlighted that the Jewish faith rested on tenets of second chances, and that the Muslim faith centered brotherly love as a key value, both of which "lined up with Amendment 4."

Reverend Rolle pinpointed a cultural shift towards centering directly impacted individuals and creating space for so-called identity politics with the Amendment 4 campaign:

> I can tell you very clearly some of our "movement leaders" [in air quotes] in 2010 and 2011 saying things like, "I don't believe in identity-based politics." Which is code for "Keep your lady stuff and your race stuff to yourself." [Or they say], "We're here to win strong politics. We know who we're here to win for, but we're all in it." That was a cultural shift, not just in the movement, but I think maybe larger.

> ## I was the only woman of color that was part of the steering committee besides Sheena Meade, Desmond's wife. And I learned a lot about the ways that donors use their resources to try to control messaging and engagement strategies.
>
> ### ANDREA MERCADO

Her assessment suggests that leaders who are not directly impacted seek broad agreement on framing so as not to alienate some voters. She noted that even moving away from language like "ex-con" or "ex-felon" to "returning citizen" helps to center directly impacted people. Rolle credited Desmond Meade with doing the deep relational work, working with national organizations, and building a coalition within Florida that sparked this shift.

In spite of Amendment 4's official race-neutral, nonpartisan messaging, race played an important role in how the campaign was framed. For example, multiple respondents noted that, in fact, more white returning citizens would benefit from Amendment 4 than Black returning citizens. **The entrenched stereotype of Blackness being associated with criminality was intentionally challenged with facts showing that this change would support white and Black Floridians alike**, which would open up voting to more Republican and Democratic constituents. Meade described the decision-making around this framing:

> *I knew that if we were to be successful, we would have to not make this a Black issue, and make it an all-American issue. Keep the campaign elevated above partisan leanings... The reality was that Black people only accounted for a third of the people who were disenfranchised. We know that the policy had origins that were specifically designed to strip the right to vote from newly freed slaves. We know that. But the reality of the world that we're living in today, says that it was not exclusively a Black issue. But because of the narrative, or the reaction that people have when they think about felon disenfranchisement, [this stereotype of it being a Black issue] contributed to the lack of support that we needed to actually move policy. So one of the things that I knew I had to do was take it from being a Black issue to being an us issue.*

To signal that the issue was nonpartisan, organizers took a race-neutral stance. But part of this framing also focused on appealing to white voters over BIPOC voters.

While a race-neutral stance may have been a winning strategy, particularly with white and conservative voters, many of the organizers interviewed expressed frustration with this approach. Mercado noted the inherent challenges: "This obsession amongst the donor class and amongst political operatives with focusing all of the messaging on what's going to move a white voter, and a lack of understanding of what it takes to mobilize Black and Latino communities that are directly impacted by these policies every day." Similarly, Mila Al-Ayoubi explained that the communication strategy was specifically designed to gain or retain support of conservative swing voters, which was necessary to reach the 60% threshold. **She delineated how the official language of the campaign was constrained by tailoring to white voters, and explicitly stated that the delicateness with which they had to tread around language was in and of itself racist:**

> *The racist messaging was around second chances itself because not everybody even gets a first chance who are in the system. Also, we didn't want to talk about the "Jim Crow Era," because it's triggering for white people and their white fragility shuts them down. So we talked about "post-Civil War Era." We couldn't say "voting rights" because that was a trigger for conservatives, so we started using "voting eligibility."*

Corryn Freeman, who works for the Statewide Alignment Group (SWAG) and served as the Field Director for the Amendment 4 campaign, echoed this and remembered having to carefully avoid racist dog whistles. She explained, "We had to disassociate everything from

Black and Brown people and talk about the poor white people who are in prison and who deserve a second chance." Al-Ayoubi contrasted the messaging official communications framing with the messages that resonated with BIPOC communities in Florida. "Our communities and where we were organizing on the ground, they want to hear [explicit language about race]. They know Jim Crow. They know it's about race. They know it's about slavery."

An unofficial messaging strategy around race was used to target BIPOC voters and unlikely voters. Andrea Mercado explained that while people working on the campaign had been asked to respect Amendment 4's official messaging, they also had an agreement that they "could talk the way [they] needed to talk [when knocking] on doors." That meant bringing in an explicit discussion of race:

> *It was really important to us that our message connects with our ideology of building long term power and transformative change. We didn't want to lead with the message of second chances, which was the message that was leading on radio and on digital [media platforms]. Our focus was talking to Black and Brown communities, working-class communities, and infrequent voters. The conversation that we wanted to have was around the criminalization of Black and Brown people, the legacy of Jim Crow, and the need for transformative change. It was a challenging needle to thread, because the ballot initiative campaign was being really careful to be nonpartisan or bipartisan. But for us, we knew that in the communities that we work in, we knew the message that we wanted to get across.*

As many organizers in Florida recounted, attempting to mask the racist histories or racially inequitable outcomes and implications of policies is not a winning narrative or framing strategy for Black or Latinx voters. Building power in these communities requires confronting these realities head-on. While this tension around messaging is similar to what organizers in Oregon were contending with, it played out differently in Florida because people who were directly impacted were the ones making the decisions for themselves and choosing what narratives were worth pushing.

CHALLENGES

Trust in the Vision

Early on, one of the challenges faced by this effort was the lack of support and trust in Desmond Meade's vision of a campaign and organization (FRRC) centering the experiences of and being led by directly impacted individuals. Reverend Thomas lamented:

> One of the biggest challenges that we faced, and I often remind Desmond of it [was] at the beginning, how hard it was to get other organizations to see the vision that really lied in Desmond. Once we had gotten all the petitions signed, everyone saw the vision. Well, that annoyed me. Because I [wanted to ask], "Where were you when we just asked if you would help us make copies or donate copies?"

Funding

Closely related to the issue of supporting Meade's vision early on, was the issue of acquiring funding to support his vision and this work in its early stages. Meade recalled that though they were eventually able to draw in donors and politically savvy experts to join the steering committee alongside "organic grassroots organizations," those in positions to support the work were not part of the early movement that had led to the ballot initiative. Meade explained:

> The first few years of the ballot initiative we really didn't have any money. And when I say any money, what I mean is that I had volunteers take the sheets off of their bed, go to an arts and crafts store, buy some paint, and paint our logo on their sheet, so they can use it to table events, to collect signatures. That's how broke we were.

Certainly the creativity, commitment, determination, and hard work of the FRRC team was key, but financial support could boost and amplify their efforts earlier in the campaign timeline.

Outside Consultants

Similar to other case study sites, local organizers on the ground in Florida experienced and reported tensions with outside consultants. The parachute model of consulting for civic engagement around ballot initiatives and electoral politics more broadly was widely described as antithetical to the goals of power-building in local communities. What's more, organizers disclosed tensions in working with paid, outside consultants. From discrepancies in pay to feeling like there was a lack of trust and respect for local canvassers' knowledge of their communities, most organizers reported a preference for working with local consultants. Gunder described the frustrations she experienced with white outsiders who were paid by outside consultants to support canvassing efforts. She explained how they did not listen to local organizers about practices on the ground that were "culturally fitting for our community" or matters of safety. Gunder gave a poignant example:

> We were in an area called Brownsville, and we went out to canvas. We had a lot of doors to hit, it was getting late, and they didn't finish the list. And I [told them], "Listen, y'all just need to come on back, and we'll come back tomorrow." [The canvassers responded] "No, no, no. We're going to just keep pushing." [Then I said] "Listen, this is not an option. I need y'all to come on back," because that is one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Miami. I'm telling them that for safety reasons and the culture reason, why it's not okay for [them] to be there after dark knocking on doors, trying to pass out literature. So that was a really big headache. When you have national folks coming in to help out with canvassing, trust the people who are on the ground who lead these canvases and launch them all the time.
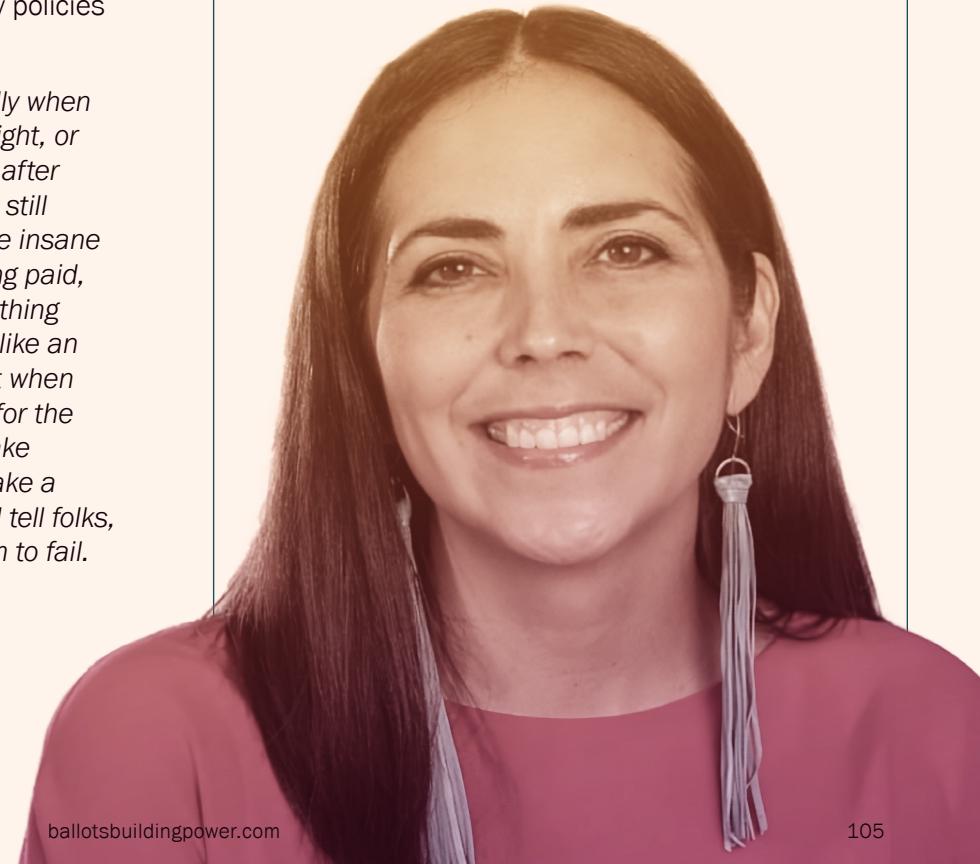
Reverend Rolle offered that when working with local consultants, those from or connected to the communities most directly impacted, proved to be a more harmonious and successful strategy. She explained, "What we found is consultants that come from our communities help a lot more. When I worked for the Amendment 4 campaign at the end of 2018, they hired me on a consulting basis. [Consultants are] best deployed when they come from within the movement and have relationships and ties in the state." She commented that instead, what often plays out is that consultants are brought in from "New York and DC" who criticize Florida as a state that keeps flipping from blue to red. "Those folks come, they struggle, and they leave. And then they get another contract," she declared. Even without a track record of success, the perception on the ground is that outside consultants can win contracts to make decisions around strategy in contexts with which they are not familiar. Meade echoed this sentiment and made the further point that while outside consultants are permitted by funders and donors to make mistakes, those from the communities most impacted by policies do not get the same leeway:

> You've got to give us room to fail. Especially when historically we've seen our counterparts, right, or people who don't look like me losing cycle after cycle after cycle after cycle. And they were still getting contract after contract. It was some insane amount that these consultants were getting paid, and then come to us for help for free. The thing is, individuals who didn't look like me had like an insane amount of opportunities to fail. But when people like me are engaging philanthropy for the first time, we're so scared to make a mistake because we figured that the minute we make a mistake, that's it with the funding. And so I tell folks, the most important thing is to give us room to fail.

Rolle concluded that the solution is to invest instead in the long-term building needed within directly impacted communities:

> After a while, after 10–20 years, you realize that it is not because Florida's not smart enough to do the stuff. It's because you have to invest for the long term. And whether that person is housed at an organization or is in a consultant role with an organization, you just got to have a broader movement. One or five smart consultants will not win anything in this state.

ANDREA MERCADO

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM BUILT POWER AT THE BALLOT

LOUISIANA

While Florida's criminal justice reform focused on civil rights upon the completion of a criminal sentence, in Louisiana the reform targeted the front end of sentencing. In 2018, the state passed Amendment 2, the "Unanimous Jury Verdict for Felony Trials Amendment" with 64.35% of the vote. Prior to the passage of Amendment 2 Louisiana was one of two states that permitted non-unanimous jury convictions. The amendment to the state constitution now requires unanimous jury convictions for felony trials, as opposed to 10 of 12 jurors as previously had been the case.

This campaign, in some ways, had higher stakes than other states. Louisiana is the only state with a system of codified law rather than common law. Generally speaking, the judicial system is not one built upon legal precedent. This is significant for Amendment 2 because, as Nia Weeks, the attorney who founded Citizen SHE United, summarized,"when something is written and passed through our legislature, that is the thing that people are going to be beholden to." The successful campaign that put an end to non-unanimous juries reveals the importance of tailored messaging, the brilliance of novel organizing tactics in communities often ignored in civic engagement efforts, the power of having directly impacted people and Black women leading the charge, and the ways in which bipartisanship can work even with a racial reckoning.

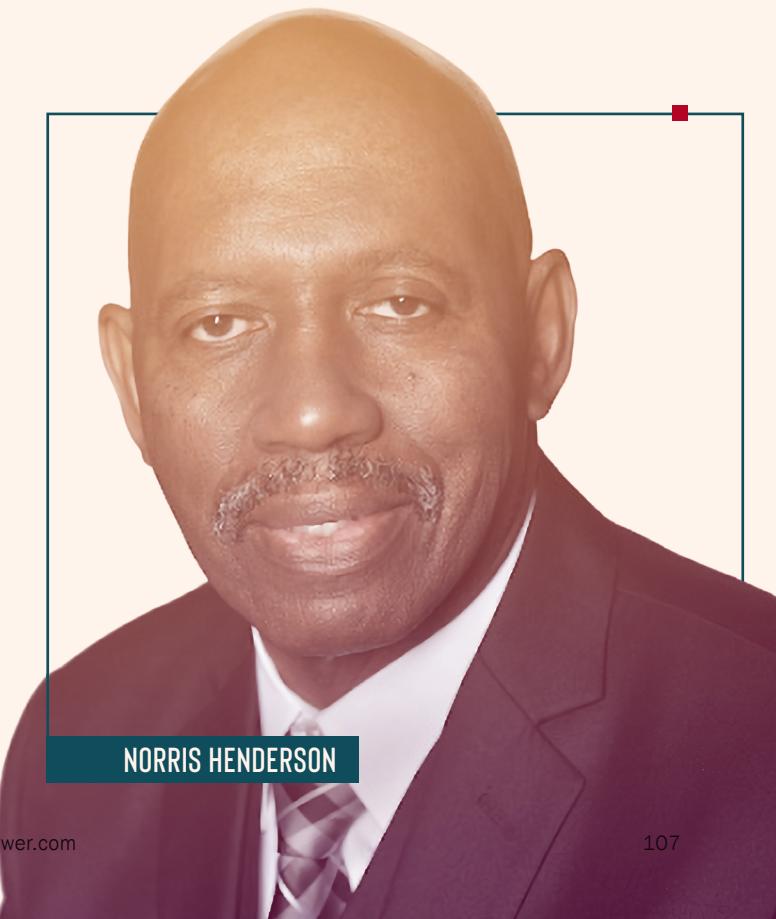# Directly Impacted People & Black Women Building Power

Louisiana's successful fight to end non-unanimous juries was led by directly impacted people and Black women. Norris Henderson, founder and Executive Director of the VOTE, was instrumental in garnering the momentum to end non-unanimous juries and leading the campaign for Amendment 2. Henderson shared his personal journey as a directly impacted person:

> My role was the Campaign Director. I led the campaign. And one of the things about this campaign, which was unique in a sense, was that it was led by somebody who had been directly impacted by the law itself. I had a non-unanimous jury verdict, so it was easy for me to tell the story about what happened and what my expectations were. I remember when the jury came back and it was 10–2. I [thought to myself], "Oh, I'm out of here!" And the sheriff [said], "Man, I'm sorry to hear that." I [responded], "Sorry, to hear what?" He said, "You got found guilty." It was two people to say, not guilty. But being 19 years old, being naive, not knowing that Louisiana laws didn't require a unanimous jury verdict, off to prison I went. And that became this little claw in my side, that thing that just dug at me. And then when I got in the law library and started to actually learn the law and became proficient at it, [I learned that] there was actually a case in Louisiana, Johnson versus Louisiana, which in 1973, two years before I went to prison, actually challenged it. The United States Supreme Court said it was fine for Louisiana and Oregon. And so we have been on that trail since 1973.

Henderson was sent to prison in 1975 and began learning and organizing from inside. This work began decades before Amendment 2 was brought before voters in 2018.

Henderson described how the Yes on 2 Coalition was pieced together, and how centering the experiences of directly impacted people was paramount for their strategy. He explained that early on, many different kinds of supporters—"people from all walks of life"—wanted to join the campaign. There were big players like the ACLU and the Southern Poverty Law Center as well as grassroots, power-building organizations like the Power Coalition and VOTE. He emphasized that consultants also wanted to participate in the campaign, and tried to persuade the coalition away from sharing the stories of directly impacted individuals. The consultants, he relayed, were concerned that telling stories would unveil the "racial connotations" of the history of the law. As Henderson put it plainly, "But it is what it is. It was born out of racism." He admitted that being the face of the campaign, he did not want to hide the history and reality of racism that undergirded Louisiana's jury practices. "My greatest fear," he shared, "was not being able to tell our people the truth." Unwilling to abandon the stories of those directly impacted by the law, a dual strategy was pursued. "And so we decided that y'all chart your course, we're going to chart ours," he recounted.

NORRIS HENDERSON

The campaign was driven by a team of directly impacted people. As the Lead Organizer for Yes on 2 and someone who had experienced incarceration in her own family, Alison McCrary explained:

> *The Unanimous Juries Campaign and the Yes On 2 campaign was unique and special in that it was really led by system impacted people, by those of us who have experience with the system of incarceration either directly as formerly incarcerated people or as family of impacted people. We made sure that we took the lead from people who had been convicted by non-unanimous juries. And we made sure that they were front and center as spokespeople.*

Black women's leadership was also central to the passage of Amendment 2. Ashley Shelton is the Founder and CEO of the Power Coalition for Equity and Justice, the civic engagement table for Louisiana. She explained how the Power Coalition took a leadership role in supporting voter engagement by managing the data:

> *All of the voter file—being back office of that campaign—we had the privilege of ensuring that everybody that worked on that campaign had the right lists, the right information. That information was getting uploaded and put back into the [Voter Activation Network (VAN)] for the next campaign. And it was a tremendous task. [We] also had the opportunity of supporting the legislation when it was actually in the legislative process.*

Shelton oversaw the coordination of a large coalition and built power in the process by strengthening their voter database through the civic engagement work being done.

In line with the mission of Citizen SHE United, Nia Weeks's contribution to the Amendment 2 campaign was to run Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts in northern Louisiana, based in Shreveport. Weeks delineated the importance of doing this work in Shreveport:

ASHLEY SHELTON

We were tasked with running the GOTV work in North Louisiana in a wonderful town called Shreveport. We ran the entire GOTV campaign for that. It was actually our inaugural GOTV project; first time we ever ran a campaign, and we were really excited to be a part of that program. The reason we were interested in working in North Louisiana was because we're building a new base of Black women across the state. It's really easy to organize Black women in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, but I felt that the real work was going to be organizing Black women outside of cities that had real infrastructure, a lot of support, and Shreveport was right on that cusp. They had really incredible organizers. They had incredible work that they were doing. Everyone around the state was trying to figure out how to penetrate Shreveport, recognizing that if we were able to penetrate Shreveport and help them build out a real progressive base that we could do really amazing work throughout the entire state. And so of course Citizen SHE recognized the value of North Louisiana too.

As evidenced by both Shelton and Weeks' tremendous contributions to Yes on 2, the role of Black women—in addition to bringing their expertise and leveraging their connections to impacted communities—was their vision and commitment to building infrastructure and political power that would outlast the campaign.

In addition to the brilliant ways in which Black women laid out a vision and plan for power-building through the Amendment 2 campaign, innovative organizing strategies and tactics also contributed to the growing base and infrastructure that was built through the fight for unanimous juries. One example of the ingenious approaches to organizing was Henderson's organizing inside prisons. He recounted:

NIA WEEKS

I started going through all the prisons across the state, talking to the guys inside, telling them, "Hey, man, this is the campaign we launched but I need y'all to get in touch with your moms and dads, everybody who is on your visit list and on your phone list. We're going to be coming to a town near them. This is what the campaign is about. We're going to try to undo this Jim Crow practice in Louisiana." And so the folks inside were hyped.

By appealing to individuals who were incarcerated, encouraging them to get their loved ones on board, and speaking with visitors at prisons, Henderson was able to inspire people who were directly impacted by non-unanimous juries as well as their loved ones. In addition, many of these individuals were infrequent or unlikely voters, which helped bring new communities into civic engagement and voting.

Surprising Bipartisanship

The Yes On 2 campaign was a bipartisan effort. Louisiana is not a "ballot initiative state," so in order to have a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment make it to the ballot, it needs approval of 60% of the legislature. As a red state, winning in Louisiana meant that legislators and voters across the aisle had to support this amendment.

The amendment was authored by State Senator JP Morrell, a Democrat from New Orleans. One of the major conservative proponents of Amendment 2 was Ed Tarpley, the former Grand Parish District Attorney, who has long held the belief that unanimous juries are important for liberty and should be treated as an essential right. Henderson described how they collaborated:

> *Ed Tarpley [and I would] travel all across the state, telling these stories. Everywhere we could go and get in, we would go and tell these stories. We were at universities, educating the criminal justice students, the law students about what this ugly law had done, and how it had led to Louisiana leading the nation in per capita incarceration.*

To have a prosecutor alongside someone who was impacted by non-unanimous juries advocating for a change was a powerful message to conservative and liberal voters alike.

Another set of surprising supporters of Amendment 2 were gun rights advocates. Henderson explained the reason behind their support: "The other unlikely ally we got was these right wing people who were gun lobbyists. And they started campaigning on our behalf saying that if they, if the state can take this from us, they can come and take our guns." Ryan Haynie, who worked as a consultant on Yes On 2, described a advertisement that was released by Blake Miguez, a conservative state representative:

> *There was a video that got made about Yes On 2. It was [made by] Blake Miguez. He is as far right as you can imagine a State Rep. He was on Top Shot. He is a world champion pistol shooter. And he turned the issue around to a certain degree, [saying] "your rights can be taken away," and "you can lose your rights to bear arms and the other freedoms you hold dear with a non-unanimous jury." He talked about our forefathers. It was a pretty cool, very right angle.*

KEY MESSAGING:
Jim Crow's Legacy and Personal Freedoms

To resonate with different constituents, tailored messaging was used in the Amendment 2 campaign. Alison McCrary explained the conservative communications strategy:

> *We tailored our communications plan and the campaign build-out around: How do we communicate this to people [in a way] that is not going to be so divisive? What can bring us together? And so a lot of our messaging for folks on the more conservative end of the political spectrum was around liberty, freedom, what the founding fathers of the United States wanted for the jury system in this country.*

Focusing on people's personal freedoms allowed the campaign to build a broad spectrum of support, but it also did not challenge the structural racism embedded in the penal system, which could have led to more transformative organizing down the road.

Lynda Woolard, who served as a statewide Field Organizer for the campaign described the liberal messaging:

> *For the liberal messaging, it was really just about fairness and the fact that we were one of only two states that still had this sort of discriminatory law. We could use that language, "discriminatory law"; [that] was fair game. And while we were one of only two states, we were the worst of the two, because you could be sentenced to life here with a non-unanimous jury; we were the only state where that was the case.*

As Woolard implies, the official messaging of the campaign tried to tread lightly on its messaging that might raise issues of race or racism and turn off some voters. Woolard noted that in some spaces they were able to talk about how "this was a Jim Crow law," but even then, they had to be careful that such a framing would not end up being picked up by the media.

McCrary explained the argument behind choosing messaging that focused on Louisiana being behind the rest of the country: "Louisiana is an outlier state. Louisiana has a reputation of always being behind the times as a state in this country, and how that impacts our reputation as a state and tourism and other industries that rely on the state's reputation." Beyond the business interests of the state, McCrary shared the rights-based framework:

> *We made arguments that Louisianans deserve the same protection of rights that exists in the 48 other states and in federal courts, that Louisianans shouldn't have fewer rights than citizens of Alabama, Texas, Mississippi, Florida, or New York, and that we deserve the same freedoms as everyone else in other states.*

Others involved in the campaign took a much more explicit approach to discussing race and racism in relation to the history and impact of non-unanimous juries. Jamila Johnson, an attorney who represented the Southern Poverty Law Center on the Unanimous Juries Coalition, traced the history of the Jim Crow roots of the non-unanimous juries. She described how the idea was first conceived around 1880 by the head of a convict leasing company that wanted to ensure an ample supply of labor through Louisiana's prison system. In 1898, an all-white Constitutional Convention was held with the explicit purpose of re-establishing white supremacy in Louisiana, and focused on three major areas: voting rights, education, and criminal justice. The strategies they committed to at this convention were highly effective at reducing the number of Black voters and making school segregation mandatory. This convention is also where the agreement that only 9 out of 12 jurors must find someone guilty for them to be convicted is established (this later became a 10–2 jury vote in 1974).

JAMILA JOHNSON

According to Shelton, sharing this history was essential to securing the vote of infrequent voters and Black and Brown voters. She reflected, "We have to be careful about how white supremacy sneaks its way into the work." She explained that consultants advised them not to frame the campaign or the issue in a way that might suggest the issue only affected African Americans in Louisiana or that might suggest partisanship. They were advised not to bring up "white supremacy." As Shelton noted, however, they had been working in coalition on the issue since 2015, and knew what kind of messaging resonated with the communities they were organizing. By trying to avoid being pigeonholed as a Black issue, Shelton expressed an avoidance of confronting the reality of the issue: "It was disproportionately impacting African-American people in Louisiana," she asserted. They decided not to heed the advice of the political consultants:

> [We knew] how to talk to infrequent voters of color, the messages that matter to them, and what most what actually motivates and mobilizes them. So the idea that we weren't going to be talking about white supremacy, and that we weren't going to be talking about the impacts of this particular policy on the lives of Black and Brown people across the state of Louisiana didn't make sense. Norris [Henderson] and I met in the hallway and Norris said, "We're going to do what we know how to do, and we're going to do what our gut tells us to do." And so we worked together and funded a strategy that was specifically to say all of those things directly to infrequent and frequent voters of color across the state of Louisiana. It proved to be one of the most powerful decisions that we made, because I think that's what created that turnout for that election, and in particular that level of turnout by Black voters.

While the race framing was implemented successfully with voters of color, Peter Robins-Brown who worked as a Canvass Team Manager with Step Up Louisiana at the time of Amendment 2, bemoaned the missed opportunity with a broader set of voters. He explained:

> My critique would be that [the messaging] was a little bit too centered on convincing white conservatives to vote "yes." At the same time, we got to 64% [of the vote], which is a big number, and means that we got a lot of white conservatives to vote for it. But I think it was an opportunity to really speak to people about systemic racism, how that works, and how it's so deeply entrenched in the system. Even white conservatives, even folks who would be very resistant to that kind of message. I think that this was a really good opportunity to educate them. You could have done it in a softer way, but the unanimous jury law goes back to the 1898 state convention, which was called expressly to re-establish white supremacy in Louisiana. It's just incontrovertible facts about the history of this law. I would have liked to have seen us talk about that a little bit more.

Robins-Brown's reflections on the messaging are reminiscent of what we heard from other campaigns where the short-term goals of winning the campaign were met by prioritizing white conservatives in lieu of putting out a narrative that could have done more to shift public consciousness and build more power in BIPOC communities in the long-term.

CHALLENGES

Not a Familiar Issue

The topic of non-unanimous juries was not an issue at the forefront of many Louisianans' consciousness. One respondent mentioned how neither the uniqueness nor challenges of non-unanimous juries were covered in Louisiana law schools. Others noted that voters knew little to nothing about the history or implications of non-unanimous juries. As a result, an extensive education campaign was required in order to inform voters about the issue.

Outside Consultants Lacked Racial Equity Lens

Outside consultants advised against referencing non-unanimous juries' racist history or its racially inequitable outcomes throughout the campaign. As we heard in other states, while talking about racism and white supremacy may have alienated some white voters, using blanket messaging that was created with white conservatives in mind exacerbated barriers and tensions. For example, one respondent described the communications consultant with disdain saying, "her racial equity lens is not where it needs to be." Ashley Shelton also shared some of challenges that arose from her interactions with outside consultants:

> *The marketing and communications consultants were like, "No. If you talk about white supremacy, this is over. You're going to lose. Absolutely not." Well, you know, the Power Coalition in particular talks to infrequent voters of color, and so I was like how are you going to tell me what to tell Black people (laughing) about how they feel about an issue that yeah, for me, it is absolutely about white supremacy and that's exactly why Black voters are going to turn out for this. It's exactly why this*

> *matters, right? I talked to Black voters and if you tell them white supremacy, they're getting out the vote, okay? So like, why are we running from the history of this? Why are we running from the real messaging that would have mattered?... The number one lesson I learned is that I definitely don't need a communications consultant to tell me how to talk to Black people (laughing).*

Several other respondents objected to outside consultants' push to run a race-neutral campaign. Coupled with consultants' insistence on leaving out language of race was their distrust of the expertise of the Black women and system-impacted individuals who were leading the charge. Shelton asserted that one consultant in particular "thought that we were just some little grassroots, Black-led organizations that had never done this before or didn't have real capacity. And I was like, "Sweetie, I am not some little grassroots organization." Indeed, both Shelton and Henderson were leading organizations with multi-million dollar budgets and running sophisticated voter engagement campaigns.

Short Timeline & Late Financial Support

While the campaign was eventually catapulted into the national media with support from the likes of singer, John Legend, the campaign ran on an extremely tight timeline. As McCrary noted, "Once it got passed in the legislature and we knew it was going to be on the ballot, we really had just a very short [time frame]: three months to raise money, hire staff, build a campaign, and try to get a Republican red state to end a 138 year old Jim Crow law." Funding for the effort did not come through until September 6, 2018, just two months before the election. Earlier financial investment would have meant more freedom to train and hire local organizers to move the campaign once it passed in the legislature.

POWER-BUILDING ASSESSMENT:
Criminal Justice Reform

OUTCOMES		
METRIC	Yes/No	DETAILS
Newly activated individuals	Yes	Many people were activated as organizers in both campaigns. For instance, more than 8,000 people volunteered for the Amendment 4 campaign in Florida.
New voters or communities participating in electoral politics	Yes	Respondents in Louisiana described how even the conservative parishes and cities that they organized in, such as Shreveport, voted in support of Amendment 2, and Amendment 4 received more than 5 million votes in Florida.
New organizations/programs	Yes	In Florida, Desmond formally incorporated the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition as an organization and turned it into an organization of returning citizens rather than an organization of organizations; now it has more than 7,000 members, 20+ chapters, an email list of 10,000–15,000, and a database of more than 1 million returning citizens. Itohan Ighodaro also founded Hard Knocks Strategies, and the Dream Defenders added a fellowship program that paid 50 young people to engage in electoral organizing in Florida. In Louisiana, the Unanimous Juries Campaign helped organizations like Citizen SHE United get on their feet and build power and credibility.
New networks, coalitions or organizing relationships	Yes	In Florida, Ighodaro built out a statewide grassroots organizing coalition of 200 organizations. In Louisiana, the campaign formalized relationships with local groups that already had strong ground games, such as New Ground Strategies, Citizen SHE, the Jeremiah Group, a group of faith leaders, the Neighborhood Partnership Network, the Southwest Louisiana Community Coalition, Step Up Louisiana, Women with a Vision, and VAYLA.

Table 5. Criminal Justice Reform Campaigns Power-Building Assessment

OUTCOMES		
METRIC	**Yes/No**	**DETAILS**
New funders	Yes	Respondents described seeing money like they had never seen before flooding into their states as these campaigns got underway.
New audience or increased attention	Yes	Both the Amendment 4 campaign and the Unanimous Juries Campaign gained national and inter-state attention. One example of this in Louisiana was John Legend offering to record a robocall to encourage voters to support the Unanimous Juries Campaign.
New access to decision making	Yes	People who were system-impacted and Black women were the primary decision-makers in spaces that they had previously been excluded from in both states. Desmond Meade and Norris Henderson were able to set the agenda and strategy for their respective campaigns and Black women like Itohan Ighodaro (FL) and Ashley Shelton (LA) were seen as trusted leaders capable of making big decisions and leading successful campaigns.
New positional power for communities that have been traditionally marginalized	Yes	Meade and Henderson are now nationally recognized as leaders in this work.

Table 5 outlines how Louisiana and Florida's criminal justice reform campaigns successfully met many of the metrics in our power-building assessment. This evaluation reveals some of the ways in which these campaigns can be models for organizing in other states.

Table 5. Criminal Justice Reform Campaigns Power-Building Assessment, *continued*

PROCESSES		
METRIC	**Yes/No**	**DETAILS**
New frameworks or narratives in explaining an issue	Yes	In Louisiana, organizers candidly had conversations about Jim Crow laws, anti-Black racism, and their own experiences of incarceration. In Florida, organizers effectively broadened the conversation about who stood to benefit from restoring the right to vote for people with prior felony convictions.
New organizing models, strategies or tactics	Yes	In Louisiana, VOTE created a new model that formed a base of people who were incarcerated or formerly incarcerated and mobilized their networks. In Florida, young organizers formed the Statewide Alignment Group (now Florida for All) and emphasized meeting their constituents where they were by ensuring that organizers were representative of their constituents and could share information in their languages. Both campaigns also built statewide power by creating distributed hubs that connected cities and rural areas.
Expanding know-how to new groups around ballot initiative or other civic engagement processes	Yes	Both campaigns led trainings for organizers that prepared groups to continue the fights past these specific campaigns, for example Sheena Rolle's work with Faith in Action in Florida and VOTE's work in Louisiana.

PROCESSES

METRIC	Yes/No	DETAILS
Community has autonomy and agency throughout the campaign	Somewhat	In Louisiana, VOTE and the Power Coalition asserted their authority and made decisions based on what they believed was best for their communities, despite the direction of consultants on the project. In Florida, funders pressured local organizations to partner with specific consultants, but community leaders still acted with their own discretion, showing that they did have some agency.
Community knowledge is respected in the process	Yes	Both campaigns were born out of community knowledge and the recognition that people closest to the pain are also closest to the solutions. Some outside consultants tried to stifle community leadership in both fights, however, ultimately Henderson and Meade's visions and commitments to centering people who were directly impacted shaped the campaigns.
Campaigns are accountable to community members	Somewhat	Many of the organizations involved in Louisiana's fight for unanimous juries have deep roots in Black communities, which necessitates a certain level of accountability. Similarly, in Florida, leadership of community members from across geographies, faiths, and walks of life indicates that this was grounded in community interests. However, neither of the campaigns talked about forming community advisory boards or other structures that would formalize accountability to community members.

TAKEAWAYS FOR INNOVATIONS IN POWER-BUILDING AND FOLLOWING DIRECTLY IMPACTED PEOPLE'S LEADERSHIP

Building Transformative Power

The campaigns in Florida and Louisiana demonstrate how much power can be built when power-building is the explicit goal. These campaigns pulled off victories that many never believed could happen, and they did it by following the leadership of people who were closest to the issues and building out grassroots campaigns that prioritized long-term vision, adopted innovative strategies, and led to a mass mobilization of new voters.

Following the leadership of directly impacted people leads to meaningful wins.

The people who led these fights were personally impacted by the criminal justice system and developed strategies that centered others who were system-impacted. This created new organizing models and possibilities, garnered a broad spectrum of support, and mobilized millions of people in Florida and hundreds of thousands of people in Louisiana.

Tailored micro-targeting can be more effective than messaging that appeals to white swing voters.

While many pollsters and communications consultants have a practice of focusing messaging on swing voters who tend to be white middle-aged women, these case studies show that bipartisan framing that is hyper-focused on not triggering white people may alienate BIPOC voters. In this context, different constituencies preferred a range of messages, some of which focused on the law's history and its implications and others which focused on personal liberty and second chances.

Innovative strategies can reach unlikely and infrequent voters.

New strategies to bring the issues to new populations also proved to be effective in Florida and Louisiana. In Shreveport, Citizen SHE United was able to make unanimous juries feel relevant and engaging by using social media platforms that young people were already on, plugging into events that people were already excited about, and making videos that matter to people. VOTE's focus on organizing people in "prison towns" and leveraging the connections of people who were incarcerated also activated vast new networks of voters. These strategies built power and infrastructure, especially among unlikely and infrequent voters.

Building Power by Strengthening Capacity.

Where traditional civic engagement is measuring the outcomes of elections as a test of power, these organizations are building power by developing leaders, organizations, and community consciousness around voting as a tool for exercising power.

For many organizations, elections and electoral fights are one tool in a larger strategy to overhaul systems for liberation.

This lesson ties into our finding that organizers may decide to take losses in the short-term when the strategy is in line with their long-term vision. This approach also allows organizers to be more innovative since they are not as constrained by traditional tactics that tend to focus on appealing to swing voters.

Consultants and donors can expect to be held to account to the same set of values that exist in the community.

The challenges that emerged between some of the consultants and funders who supported these campaigns teach us the value of connecting with people with ties to the local communities and following their leadership.

Campaigns continue to be carried by Black and Brown women.

While Black men were the impetus and driving force for both Florida's Amendment 4 campaign and Louisiana's Amendment 2 campaign, Black and Brown women were responsible for much of the work that went into making their fights a success. This speaks to a commitment to liberation work that goes beyond ego and accolades and highlights their important role in the ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

While measuring power building involves an in-depth exploration of context, strategy, procedure, and outcomes than a more surface-level analysis of electoral results, our research shows that it can be done and offer helpful insights in the process. The six case studies present compelling evidence to:

- broaden our understanding of the utility of ballot initiatives to include the role they can play in forming connective tissue between previously disparate organizations or individuals
- build community and consciousness in addition to any policy change that results from their electoral success

Policy reforms have the potential to be meaningful and important, but in the arc toward liberation, shifting who holds power is what truly matters.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

As more groups around the country embrace ballot initiatives as a strategy for changing policy, we find value in reviewing the top five lessons from these case studies.

FIRST

For many organizations, elections and ballot initiatives are one tool in a larger strategy for liberation.

SECOND

Campaigns that followed the leadership of directly impacted people and Black and Brown women built power.

THIRD

Prioritizing transformative change over short-term wins built more power.

FOURTH

Trusting local leaders on strategy led to greater mobilization.

FIFTH

Reaching unlikely allies helped to win campaigns.

APPENDIX A
LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

The following people participated in this research project. The job titles listed here reflect their roles in 2018, with the exception of the ones that are asterisked, which is used for participants who joined the organizations after the campaigns.

Oakland, CA

- Alvina Wong, Campaign and Organizing Director, Asian Pacific Environmental Network
- Camilo Zamora, Lead Organizer, Causa Justa::Just Cause
- Dan Kalb, Councilmember, City of Oakland
- Eddie Ytuarte, Organizer, Oakland Tenants Union
- Elizabeth Suk, Political Director, Oakland Rising
- James Vann, Organizer, Oakland Tenants Union
- Laiseng Saechao, State Organizer, Asian Pacific Environmental Network
- Leah Simon-Weisberg, Directing Attorney, Tenant Rights Practice, Centro Legal de La Raza
- Sheryl Walton, Organizer, Oakland Rising

Portland, OR

- Alison McIntosh, Deputy Director, Policy & Communications, Oregon Housing Alliance / Neighborhood Partnerships
- Angela Martin, Senior Director, Wheelhouse Northwest
- Anneliese Koehler, Public Policy Advocate, Oregon Food Bank
- Becca Uherbelau, Executive Director, Our Oregon
- Beckie Lee, Campaign Manager, Yes for Affordable Housing
- Duncan Hwang, Associate Director, Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon
- Jenny Lee, Advocacy Director, Coalition of Communities of Color
- Jes Larson, Housing Policy Manager, Metro
- Katrina Holland, Executive Director, Community Alliance of Tenants
- Megan Wever, Statewide Coalition & Communications Manager, Yes for Affordable Housing
- Robin Ye, Political Director, Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon

Nebraska

- Adam Morfeld, State Senator, State of Nebraska
- Amanda Gershon, Co-Sponsor, Insure the Good Life Campaign
- Becky Gould, Executive Director, Nebraska Appleseed
- Brian Depew, Executive Director, Center for Rural Affairs
- Jonathan Hladik, Policy Director, Center for Rural Affairs
- Kathy Campbell, Former State Senator, State of Nebraska
- Katie Weitz, Executive Director, Weitz Family Foundation
- Kinzie Mabon, Field Director, Nebraska Civic Engagement Table
- Linda Ohri, Action Team Organizer, Omaha Together One Community
- Mark Hoeger, Action Team Organizer, Omaha Together One Community
- Mary Spurgeon, Action Team Organizer, Omaha Together One Community
- Meg Mandy, Campaign Manager, Insure the Good Life Campaign
- Meg Mikolajczyk, Deputy Director, Planned Parenthood Advocates Nebraska / Deputy Director & Legal Counsel, Planned Parenthood North Central States
- Molly McCleary, Health Care Access Program Deputy Director, Nebraska Appleseed
- Ryan Morrissey, Senior Organizer, Heartland Workers Center*
- Zack Burgin, Executive Director, Nebraska Civic Engagement Table

Montana

- Amanda Cahill, Director of Quality and Government Relations, American Heart Association
- Amanda Frickle, Director, Montana Voices
- Ella Smith, Program Director, Montana Women Vote / Field Director, Initiative I-185
- Garrett Lankford, Legislative Organizer, Montana Human Rights Network
- Heather O'Loughlin, Co-Director, Montana Budget and Policy Center
- Rachel Pauli, Organizing & Outreach Manager, Planned Parenthood Advocates Montana
- Rich Rasmussen, President & CEO, Montana Hospital Association
- SJ Howell, Executive Director, Montana Women Vote
- Ta'jin Perez, Deputy Director, Western Native Voice

Florida

- Alex Newell Taylor, Distributed Organizing Team Lead, Amendment 4 Campaign
- Andrea Mercado, Executive Director, New Florida Majority
- Brigham Johnson, Digital Organizing Program Manager, Floridians for a Fair Democracy
- Coryn Freeman, Field Director, Amendment 4 Campaign / Project Manager, Statewide Alignment Group
- Court Fuller, Communications & Field, Amendment 4 Campaign / Online Advocacy & Fundraising Manager, Public Citizen
- Desmond Meade, Executive Director, Florida Rights Restoration Coalition
- Dwight Bullard, State Senator, State of Florida

- Itohan Ighodaro, State Grassroots Director, Amendment 4 Campaign / Executive Director, Hard Knocks Strategies
- Levell Strong, Regional Organizer, Amendment 4 Campaign
- María Torres López, Distributed Organizer Program Manager, Floridians for a Fair Democracy
- Mila Al-Ayoubi, Voter Engagement Director, Amendment 4 Campaign
- Rachel Gilmer, Co-Executive Director, Dream Defenders
- Rhonda Thomas, Deputy Director, Faith in Florida
- Shabd Simon-Alexander, Distributed Organizing Program Manager, Amendment 4 Campaign
- Sheena Rolle, Organizing Consultant, Florida Rights Restoration Coalition / Co-Founder, Organize Florida
- Siottis Jackson, Organizer, Statewide Alignment Group
- Stephanie Porta, Executive Director, Organize Florida
- Valencia Gunder, Criminal Justice Program Manager, New Florida Majority

Louisiana
- Alison McCrary, Statewide Director of Operations, Unanimous Jury Coalition / Yes on 2 Campaign
- Ashley Shelton, Executive Director, The Power Coalition for Equity and Justice
- Benjamin Zucker, Co-Director, Step Up Louisiana
- Candice Battiste, North Louisiana Field Organizer, Citizen SHE United
- Jamila Johnson, Senior Supervising Attorney, Southern Poverty Law Center
- Laura Veazey, Strategy Consultant, Amendment 2 Campaign
- Lynda Woolard, Statewide Field Organizer, Amendment 2 Campaign
- Nia Weeks, Founding Executive Director, Citizen SHE United
- Norris Henderson, Founder, Voice of the Experienced
- Peter Robins-Brown, Canvass Team Manager for New Orleans, Step Up Louisiana
- Ryan Haynie, Consultant & Lobbyist, Haynie & Associates
- Will Harrell, Chair, Yes On 2 Political Action Committee / Senior Public Policy Counsel, Voice of the Experienced

National / Multi-State
- Alexis Anderson-Reed, Executive Director, State Voices
- Brandon Jessup, Deputy Director East of Data and Technology, State Voices
- Chris Melody Fields Figueredo, Executive Director, Ballot Initiative Strategy Center
- Dan Woolf, Program Manager, FieldWorks
- Gladys Washington, Former Deputy Director, The Mary Babcock Foundation
- Jenn Epps-Addison, Co-Executive Director, Center for Popular Democracy
- Jonathan Schleifer, Executive Director, The Fairness Project
- Lewis Granofsky, Partner, FieldWorks
- Marrissa Leibling, Director of Policy, State Voices
- Sophia Tripoli, State Campaigns Manager, Families USA

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Questions for Organizations: General Organizational Structure, Mission & Goals

1. I would like to begin by asking you to introduce yourself and tell us a bit about your role and responsibilities at <name of organization>?
2. Can you tell me a bit about <name of organization>?

   a. If needed:
      i. How big is the organization?
      ii. About what percentage of your organization is salaried staff? What percentage is volunteer?
      iii. How is the organization structured? What are the major areas of work? Which positions are responsible for which tasks?
      iv. How much of (what percentage) the work done by your organization would you say is focused on civic engagement?
3. Can you tell us a bit about your organization's mission and the biggest goals?

   a. Probe: How did this mission/these goals come to be?

Background Questions for Individuals/Activists

4. Tell us a bit about your history with activism.
5. How did you come to get involved with the work on <name of ballot initiative>?
6. Were there any people or organizations that really brought you into this work? If so, how?
7. Why is the issue of <criminal justice reform / health care / housing> important to you personally? What about for your community?
8. Can you think of any moments that were particularly inspiring as you were doing this work?
9. Were there any particular challenges or moments of frustration? And how did you overcome it?
10. What brought you joy in this campaign for <name of ballot initiative>?

Ballot Initiative Campaign

11. How did the issue of <criminal justice reform / Medicaid expansion / affordable housing> become central to your organizing work?
12. What sparked the work leading to <name of ballot initiative>? How did the campaign for <name of ballot initiative> initiate?
13. What was your involvement in the campaign?
14. What was the process behind developing the policy and language of the ballot initiative?
15. What was the overall framing or messaging of this campaign?

    a. Were there tailored messages for different constituents/communities/voters? How did race, ethnicity, class, region (rural/urban), gender, etc. play into this messaging?
16. What were the tax or fiscal implications of the ballot initiative/amendment/measure?

    a. Was there messaging around this?
17. Who are the heroes of the campaign? What did they do that was so important/inspiring?
18. Who was the opposition? What was their vested interest in your view? How did they put up a fight against the campaign?

Collaborators

19. Who have been your major collaborators in terms of civic engagement work in general?
20. Who have been your major collaborators in the campaign for <name of ballot initiative>?

    a. Probe: Consultants? Activists? Organizational partners? Community leaders? Elected officials? Others?
21. To what extent did political candidates speak to the issue of the ballot measure?
22. What was the role and influence of the media on the campaign?

Organizational Strategy

23. How do you define your work's core strategy?
24. Which tactics/activities are you advancing as part of your core work? Organizing a base constituency or membership
25. What strategies were used/central to the work in the campaign for <name of ballot initiative>?
26. Can you recall a moment or example that really exemplified the work that you and your organization put into this campaign/ballot initiative?

    a. Probe: How did your organization come to engage in this strategy? When? Whose idea? Who spearheaded this? Who did you collaborate with?

27. Why do you implement the particular strategies used as opposed to others?
28. How do you fund your different strategies?
29. Of these strategies, which has been most successful? Why?
30. Which of the strategies has run into the most obstacles or been least successful?

Organizational History and Future

31. As you think about your work over the next few years, what are your big, audacious power-building goals?

    a. Are any of these priorities a direct result of the <name of ballot initiative campaign> or the current moment (COVID-19 & Black Lives Matter)?

32. Have your organization's strategies always been the same?

    a. Probe: If yes, what has changed? Why? Are there intentions to incorporate new strategies?

33. What do you think your organization is currently doing well to advance your goals?
34. What do you think your organization needs to learn and grow into in order to advance your goals?
35. What have you achieved since the campaign? What are your plans beyond the win/loss?
36. What are the core issues that your organization is prioritizing through 2022? Please tell us all that apply.

Shifts in the Era of Coronavirus & Renewed Attention to Black Lives Matter

37. To what extent, if any, has your strategy shifted in light of COVID-19 or rebellions against state sanctioned murders of Black people?
38. Have your issues/areas of focus shifted at all given the Coronavirus, the recession or Black Lives Matter?
39. To what extent have any of the infrastructure or partnerships developed in the 2018 campaign for the ballot initiative served the work you are currently doing? To what extent may it have hindered this work?
40. Is there anything from the 2018 ballot initiative work (infrastructure, strategies, collaborations, etc.) that has been particularly important for your work in light of COVID-19? If so, how?

Conclusion

41. Is there anything else you'd like to share that we haven't asked about?

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