REFRAME 2016
EVALUATION & LESSONS FOR THE FIELD
Before ReFrame I didn’t have a sense of what strategic communications was. Now I know enough to know what bad or non-strategic communications looks like. Now that I have this awareness I can help cultivate and institutionalize an organization-wide sensibility around this. I now have a strategic communications lens in my head, and there is no turning back.”

Clarke Gocker
PUSH Buffalo
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The ReFrame Mentorship presents this program evaluation during a historic turning point for social justice movements. Over the past two years, we have seen the growth of a vibrant, creative, grassroots civil rights movement, from the Movement for Black Lives to Not1More and It Takes Roots. We also stand at the dawn of the Trump Era, witnessing the rise of a more powerful and emboldened Far-Right movement. Many of us are asking: How did we get here? How do we move forward?

ReFrame is moving forward by doubling down on our commitment to developing skilled communications leaders for the social justice field. The ReFrame Mentorship, in this period of consolidated right-wing political power and media control, reaffirms the need for a rigorous investment in the development of progressive, grassroots communications strategists. Now, more than ever, we need grassroots social justice leaders with the high-level skills necessary to influence public debate.

We are moving forward with this commitment for two reasons. First, our evaluation shows we are succeeding in developing the next generation of grassroots communications strategists for the social justice field. Second, history shows that we needed this kind of rigorous, continuous communications leadership development at least a generation ago.
This is part of how we got here. For too long in the social justice field, we’ve treated communications as an afterthought or a magic bullet. These trends emerge from a common misunderstanding of communications as a tactical activity rather than a core strategy. This misunderstanding leads local and regional organizations astray. Rather than proactively building communications capacities and seeking support to do so, organizations respond and react instead of shaping and controlling the conversation on their issue.

At the same time, few foundations and donors have funded communications infrastructure that would enable grassroots organizations to prioritize this core strategy. Rather than invest in grassroots-based communications leaders, both organizations and funders over-rely on outsourcing to PR firms based in New York and the Beltway. Many of these firms lack adequate understanding of social justice goals and grassroots organizing strategies. Others lack the cultural competency to effectively work with the most-impacted populations, especially those outside of urban centers like New York and Washington, D.C.

Ironically, the right-wing has long operated with a clear understanding of strategic communications. Various factions on the Right, from moderate conservatives, to the Tea Party, to the so-called “Alt-Right,” have long understood that strategic communications is central to advancing political agendas and requires a long-term, multi-faceted approach. This approach includes the development of skilled strategists, investment in long-term agendas, creation and maintenance of infrastructure, and the placement of strategists as “meaning-makers” in all arenas of society, from the grassroots to government, from think tanks to academia. Conservative funders — including the Koch Brothers — have invested in this approach to strategic communications for decades, often in the form of large grants with little-to-no strings attached.

As a result, the Right boasts a bloc of well-known pundits and behind-the-scenes architects, like famed communications strategist James O’Keefe (see sidebar on page 6), who have built a lasting infrastructure and an echo chamber that seeks to undermine progressive movements. There is no question that this right-wing communications machine fueled Trump’s rise to power and continues to push the socio-political landscape toward bigotry and hate.*

*This right-wing media infrastructure includes but is not limited to Fox News, AM radio and Breitbart News Network; communications leadership training for young activists, most notably through The Leadership Institute; established communications shops such as Berman and Company; think tanks from Cato Institute to Eagle Forum and the Heritage Foundation; and more.
But we are ready to push back. ReFrame is heeding Grace Lee Boggs’ prescient call to action: “We are at one of the great turning points in human history … [we] cannot continue in the same old way.”

At a sector level, this means taking bold steps toward deeper investment in a robust communications ecosystem. The ReFrame Mentorship is one part of the solution, working in coordination with experts in digital organizing, capacity building and strategic communications to strengthen communications infrastructure and leadership for the social justice field.

We offer this evaluation of ReFrame’s second year in the spirit of building this ecosystem together. We are committed to growing our impact, sharing our lessons and modeling what it means to “do things differently” for immediate gains and long-term change. We thank all of our funders, mentors and participants for believing in ReFrame from the beginning, and we urge others to prioritize strategic communications as a core strategy so that our communities can win.

REFRAMING THE OPPOSITION

The conservative opposition sets a clear example of what is possible when you bet on the long-game. James O’Keefe didn’t start by taking down ACORN with doctored videos. He started with Lucky Charms. While a student at Rutgers University, he launched a conservative student paper with a $500 “Balance in the Media” grant from The Leadership Institute, a conservative training institute with a targeted focus on media and an annual budget in the tens of millions.

One of the first stories O’Keefe worked on was a hit piece taking issue with the university’s cafeteria for serving Lucky Charms, something O’Keefe claimed was insulting to people of Irish descent. Foreshadowing his later “gotcha” strategies, O’Keefe put the administration between a rock and a hard place: would they be insensitive to insulted students, or would they remove the cereal from the menu and appear weak and illegitimate? After O’Keefe left Rutgers, he went to work at The Leadership Institute where he was provided with further mentorship and political development.

While O’Keefe is familiar to many in the progressive movement for his role in dismantling ACORN, countless other right-wing leaders have been trained by The Leadership Institute. Some work behind the scenes to move their agendas, some gain acclaim, others drop off the radar. To The Leadership Institute, though, the overall investment pays off when just one alumni spins a story that creates havoc for groups like Planned Parenthood, ACORN and countless other progressive organizations, both large and small.

At ReFrame, we aren’t developing the progressive O’Keefe; we’re developing the progressive anti-O’Keefe: strategic communications leaders with the confidence and skills, as well as the heart and moral fiber to forge trust-based connections that are necessary to develop the strategies and infrastructure for narrative and material change.
The ReFrame Mentorship Program aims to develop the next generation of grassroots strategic communicators. The mentorship program develops the capacity of individuals, organizations, and the field (broadly defined as groups engaged in racial, economic, and environmental justice organizing) to strengthen and integrate communications as a core strategy to achieve social justice goals. In support of this mission, the program provides mentorship and leadership development, cohort- and network-building opportunities, bootcamp-style training, and access to leading strategists in the field.
ReFrame participants (mentees) learn to develop winning communications strategies while creating conditions for long-term narrative victories. By engaging organizational leaders/supervisors (champions) as well as mentees in regular coaching, participating organizations get support to develop the infrastructure and culture shift needed to integrate communications as a core strategy for their organizations and networks.

ReFrame focuses on building both technical skills and transformative qualities among participants. Some of the core competencies required of strategic communicators include journalistic writing, digital platform management, research and fact-checking, and multimedia production skills. In addition, savvy communicators possess a range of “transformative qualities,” including the confidence and capacity necessary to be a spokesperson, develop strategy, and advocate within their organizations and networks.

Between March 2015 and September 2016, ReFrame convened two cohorts comprised of 19 mentees from organizations focused on climate, worker, criminal and racial justice. This evaluation focuses on the 10 mentees and organizations from the 2016 cohort while sharing additional outcomes from the ongoing engagement of 9 mentees from the 2015 cohort through an alumni network.
REFRAME CONTRACTED AN OUTSIDE EVALUATOR in February 2016 to help design and conduct a critical evaluation of our progress toward our goals. The evaluator, Rachel Rosner, observed ReFrame from the 2016 applicant interview process through the closing convening to gain a deep understanding of the program.

ReFrame selected Rachel for her familiarity with movement-building and research, as well as her experience developing an evaluation framework to capture transactional and transformative metrics.

The evaluation team — Joseph Phelan, Jen Soriano and Rachel Rosner — met monthly to co-design the process and tools, to reflect and capture emerging lessons, and to document successes along the way. The “we” used in this report refers to the evaluation team. Findings are presented alongside testimonials from ReFrame mentors, mentees and champions.

ReFrame’s goals and framework advance a vision of increasing strategic communications capacity from the ground-up. See page 7 for ReFrame’s goals and Appendix C for the ReFrame Framework. The formative evaluation presented in this report was, therefore, designed to measure progress toward all three of ReFrame’s
goals and to lift up lessons that guide program development for future cohorts. To measure progress toward ReFrame’s goals we looked at:

1. Growth of core competencies and transformative qualities among ReFrame mentees.

2. Shifts evident within participating organizations as they integrated communications as a core strategy for social change.

3. Early indicators of a “ripple effect,” where increased strategic capacity of participating organizations had an impact on their coalitions and networks.

In addition to the evaluator’s monthly reflection calls, the team identified data collection points throughout the mentorship process, using both quantitative and qualitative metrics. These points included: the application process, midpoint surveys, group discussions at opening and closing convenings, one-on-one exit interviews and final written evaluations. See Appendix B for a summary of data collection methods.

This report synthesizes findings from these sources, focusing on program impacts for mentees and their organizations/campaigns. We also analyze the effectiveness of program components indicating ReFrame’s progress toward its mission of developing a new generation of strategic communicators.
Our evaluation is organized to highlight outcomes and impacts at three levels:
(1) Individual, (2) Organizational, and (3) Field.

“ReFrame has been an experience of a life time that taught me a lot of lessons about communication strategy. Got Green is now in more control of the climate narrative in Seattle.”

Hodan Hassan
Got Green

“I came in kind of tentative. … Coming into the job I thought I was there to support communications, not to be integral and be able to shift it. … I was able to use the skills I learned at ReFrame to actually change it and make it better, make it more representative.”

L’Ierret Ailith
BYP100
INDIVIDUAL MENTEES entered the ReFrame Mentorship with different existing capacities. Some were new to communications work. Others had implemented communications tactics but were not leading this work or developing strategy. Others were full-time communications staff looking to advance their skills. One mentee had seven years experience; another was in her first job out of college. By the end of the program, both of these mentees expressed greater confidence in their skills and ability to make more strategic decisions about communications.

In fact, all mentees reported positive changes in their understanding of communications potential and their confidence developing and implementing communications strategies. They found that — in addition to technical skills — they gained greater confidence and trusted their leadership more. This pairing of technical skills with transformational capacities was widely noted as a strength of the program.

In terms of measurable change, pre- and post-evaluations showed a significant shift in each mentees’ self-assessment. Significant improvements were seen in both technical skills and transformative capacities. This finding was consistent with staff and mentor perceptions of mentee growth.
On the transformative side, mentees’ self-assessment of *visioning* capacity increased significantly, moving from an average of 1.8 to an average of 3.4 (on a 5-point scale), from “tending to work moment-to-moment and trying to step back and think longer term” to “tending to think longer term and apply this thinking more often than not.”

Similarly, mentees’ *leading* capacity, which we correlate with confidence, jumped a full point, from an average of 2.5 to an average of 3.5 (on a 5-point scale), from “tending to feel insecure but starting to build confidence in my abilities as a communicator and needing more support” to “leading and tending to feel confident as a communications leader in my organization.”

Within core competencies, mentees reported the greatest change in *campaign development* skills. The weighted ranking moved from an average of 2.8 to an average of 4.3 (on a 5-point scale), from “having some understanding and good knowledge of what it is,” to “having a strong understanding of what it is and how to do it.” Some mentees even approached the highest ranking of “feeling confident to teach others to do it.”

Similar improvements were reported with *communications strategy development* and *planning*, closely followed by improvements in *rapid response* skills (both with the organization and with coalitions) and *communications evaluation*. (See Appendix C for a list of rankings).

“The ongoing weekly support was the most amazing experience I have had. This is by far the best education I have ever experienced in my learning life. I feel like I have come out of my self-doubting cocoon and am on my way to transforming into a strong communicator for Indigenous and water issues.”

**Tori Cress**  
*Idle No More*

“[ReFrame] was a great experience in an area of movement work that does not have many resources for real world development. I grew in my awareness of the history of strategic communications and now see how communications can help us have a bigger impact on climate and energy. I believe others are looking at us to be a great factor in winning some victories statewide, maybe nationally.”

**Lonnie Barlow**  
*PUSH Buffalo*
With increased capacity, mentees were able to develop strategic frames and narratives, then implement communications tactics that contributed to concrete legislative and policy change. (See next section for a list of organizational wins.) Through these wins, mentees saw firsthand that shaping the narrative on their issue — and the process by which that narrative is created — can make all the difference in the effectiveness of organizing and how the issue is perceived by target audiences, including policymakers.

One year after the mentorship, the 2015 Alumni have also been particularly impressed with ReFrame’s sustained commitment and impact on their continued growth. The quality of individual support for alums was ranked very highly during the 2016 closing convening (which 2015 alumni attended). Alums described how — over the course of their post-program year — they referred to the ReFrame Toolkit and turned to their alumni cohort for troubleshooting, brainstorming and emotional support.

As many alumni navigated challenges around work/life balance and organizational issues, including the ongoing challenge of integrating communications more deeply, the alumni evaluations showed that ReFrame helped them: (1) advocate more effectively for themselves and for the communications strategies they developed; (2) take on more supervision duties; and (3) use their voices to make a difference, both within the organization and as media spokespeople.

At the end of the program, mentees from both cohorts — some of whom entered the program with little-to-no communications experience — saw themselves as strategic communicators with an important role to play in transforming their campaigns and organizations.

“Before ReFrame, I wasn’t sure if it was possible to reframe our narratives, but [as an organizer] going through the process from a communications standpoint has made me realize that comms is just as important [as organizing], because it plays a major role in tilling the soil to change our narrative.”

Stephanie Gasca
Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha
ReFrame looks at four areas of organizational communications integration: Culture, Roles, Process and Infrastructure. Mentees and champions were asked to describe conditions at the start and end of the program, and to choose an animal from the integration spectrum at right that most closely described their assessment of the four areas.

### TADPOLE
- Just birthed
- Learning how to swim

### PONY
- More time spent on comms strategy
- More organizational media coverage and relationships with reporters
- One comms person or less
- Little to no formal process

### MEERKAT
- Mob together regularly for comms strategy/planning
- Formally distributed roles, clear process & shared infrastructure
- Experienced at hunting down comms tasks
- One comms person
- Some formal process

### FLAMINGO
- Flock together as needed around comms strategy
- Some distributed comms roles, process & infrastructure
- Little to no formal process

### WOLF
- New communications trainings for members
- New organizational communications teams created
- One comms person
- Some formal process

### COMPARISON CHART

**START**
- Average rating for participating organizations at start of 2016 program

**END**
- Average rating for participating organizations at end of 2016 program

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**OUTCOMES & IMPACT**

By the end of summer 2016, California Governor Jerry Brown had signed six climate justice bills into law. One of the legislative campaigns, the Transformative Climate Communities Bill (AB 2722), co-sponsored by California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA), called for the creation of an innovative program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while funneling resources to communities on the frontlines of pollution and climate change.

ReFrame mentee Kay Cuajunco of the California Environmental Justice Alliance stated that these bills might not have been passed without support from the ReFrame mentorship. Using ReFrame tools and support, Kay and champion Amy Vanderwalker identified
why these bills faced opposition not just from the oil industry but also from moderate Democrats. The reason: A dominant narrative that suggests California is already a climate leader and “doing enough.” To overcome this complacency, CEJA needed to shift the dominant narrative and strategically pressure moderate Democrats to do more.

With support from ReFrame, mentee Kay Cuajunco created an assertive counter-narrative and better positioned CEJA as an authoritative voice in the climate policy landscape. “California isn’t actually doing enough on climate,” CEJA argued. “And we need to center equity in policy-making to ensure that community-led solutions become a reality in the most overburdened regions.”

Before ReFrame, CEJA was strong on tactics, such as developing visuals and videos to carry their messages. But with ReFrame support, CEJA developed a larger strategy that included narrative analysis, development of a counter-narrative, and audience segmentation that moved a common story and ensured their visuals, videos, op-eds and earned media reached the people they most needed to sway.

According to Cuajunco, ReFrame played a vital role by preparing and supporting CEJA to integrate strategic communications in all

MORE SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS ADVANCED THROUGH STRONGER COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

“Freedom Now,” a national day of action led by BYP 100 with the Movement for Black Lives, generated high-profile press coverage focusing attention on the need to invest in communities rather than police.

Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha and other advocates won a major victory when the Minneapolis City Council approved paid sick days for all workers at businesses with six or more employees. Later, St. Paul’s City Council passed an even more expansive paid sick days bill. Coalition communications was an integral part of the organizing strategy.

The California Domestic Workers Coalition won permanent protections for domestic workers just as a prior bill was about to sunset. By centering the voices of families — both of domestic workers and employers — in communications and launching the hashtag #DignityRising, the coalition helped turn the provisional bill into permanent law.
aspects of its organizing plan. As a result, they succeeded in lifting up stories and solutions from communities working on climate issues at the grassroots level, making the argument that these programs could benefit from more state support to bring them to scale — a win-win for impacted communities and for California.

This campaign demonstrates how an “upstream” communications strategy — in the form of reframes, counter-narratives and tailored audience targeting — can shift the advantage away from opponents, even those as powerful as the oil industry, and win precedent-setting policy change for environmental and climate justice.

INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Integrating communications strategy into organizing strategy and other areas of organizational planning is the second of ReFrame’s program goals. For many groups, this requires changes in organizational structure, roles, process and resource allocation. First and foremost, this requires changes in organizational culture.

Of the participating organizations in 2016, 8 out of 10 responded that they made organizational shifts to integrate communications work more deeply. Some changes were incremental, such as sharing regular communications reports at staff meetings. Others laid the groundwork for more fundamental shifts, such as establishing permanent communications teams or working groups.

The prevalence of these internal organizational changes is somewhat surprising given significant challenges organizations faced along the way (see Lessons section for more detail). We are pleased to see progress in spite of these hurdles.

With ReFrame’s support, mentees and champions advocated to make communications a core part of campaign planning and achieved a greater voice within their organizations, campaigns and coalitions. For example, mentee Stephanie Gasca and champion Merle Payne of Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL) worked together to bring communications planning into all aspects of their organizational work. What’s more, they began influencing the communications work of local coalitions by placing Stephanie at coalition decision-making tables. These changes put CTUL on track to win paid sick days legislation while building greater influence in regional public debates. This set them up for more victories in the short- and long-term.

At BYP 100, the training ReFrame provided increased trust in the mentee’s capacities and helped move her into a greater leadership role. She began writing official statements for the organization and

“Communications in my organization has changed a lot! It’s a much bigger responsibility now. We have a communications working group or “The Dream Team” now, which I manage, and now communications internally is a priority and not an afterthought. Now, whatever we do, we are thinking about how to message this, who is the right person for this, and making time to do the work.”

Jonathan Alingu
Central Florida
Jobs with Justice
editing organizational press releases. With this kind of added capacity, ReFrame helped organizations amplify communications impacts, and allowed organizational directors to use their time more effectively. In both cases, the mentees’ voice and expanded role began transforming the internal workings of their organizations.

Champions, whose role it was to support the formal integration of communications, did so with varying degrees of success. Those who were most successful reported that they developed some of the necessary infrastructure for communications work, such as establishing communications teams, along with processes for developing stronger, consistent messaging across the organization. Almost all champions said they appreciated ReFrame’s concrete tools and the chance to develop a more strategic perspective on communications. Several champions found ReFrame’s integration tools, combined with coaching from mentors, particularly helpful. Many shared that the ReFrame process deepened their understanding that organizing and communications should be inseparable. These champions are now more intentional in the way they integrate communications in their work. Some champions saw more progress than others, but all now understand this shift as a work-in-progress to be deepened over time.

**WHAT CHAMPIONS HAD TO SAY**

“[ReFrame is an] incredible resource to...[help you] shift your narratives and shift your thinking on how your role can move bigger things. CTUL is laser-focused on being strategic, and now we’ve learned what it is to be strategic with comms. We are now looking at how communications is integrated into every single piece of the organization. We wouldn’t have done this before. I want to see more groups have this capacity and see those reverberations.”

Brian Merle Payne
CTUL

“Jonathan really stepped into coalition spaces exhibiting leadership around agitating others, being more present, and more vocal. ... That is the support I need.”

Denise Diaz
Central Florida
Jobs with Justice

“The most important thing for me is that [our mentee] had another space that is dedicated to communications that we can’t provide. Now, organizing strategy and communications strategy go together... We are putting resources toward communications and have a dedicated communications team.”

Charlene Carruthers
BYP100
Field Impact: Mentees and Champs have more skills and capacity to support coalition and alliance communications. Indicators of this impact include:

- More confidence and ability to coordinate communications with partner organizations and alliances
- Application of ReFrame tools and trainings in coalition work
- Increased coordination with national alliances
- Increase in leadership on coalition and alliance communications teams

Organizational Impact: Mentees and Champs integrate communications strategy into organizational planning.

Peer Impact: Alumni support each other through monthly virtual meetings.

Individual Impact: Mentees build skills and relationships. These include national alliances and regional alliances and coalitions that organizations are members of, as well as movement networks that mentees are involved in outside of their jobs. These indicators of network-based field impact point toward the long-term importance of deep leadership development in strategic communications.

Social Justice Field Impact:

When looking beyond organizational boundaries, mentees reported an increase in their ability to lead communications work in coalition spaces, as well as emerging movement spaces, either by asserting the importance of controlling the narrative, or being called upon to think through messaging and strategy.

For example, Central Florida Jobs with Justice (CFJwJ) advised those responding to the tragic mass shooting at Orlando’s Pulse Nightclub in June 2016. According to mentee Jonathan Alingu, it was chaotic after the shooting and challenging for groups trying to respond quickly. With ReFrame’s support, Jonathan was in a position to help others: “It was a moment where I was able to give advice in a responsible and confident way… It got to a point where they had to seek us for help… [My mentor] pushed me to be courageous… before, I wouldn’t have done that, and I had the skills that [ReFrame] taught me to backup what I was saying.”
Similarly, other alumni shared how they were able to model strategic communications in their organizations and coalitions. Several mentees expressed that they continually brought forward the importance of controlling the narrative within their networks. One alumnus shared how her group became the “go-to” communications resource for their sister organizations.

An additional and unexpected benefit to the field has been the synergy between the five ReFrame mentors: Joseph Phelan, Jen Soriano, Kimberly Freeman Brown, Naomi Ishisaka and Shanelle Matthews. Through ongoing conversations about the program, the field, and effective support strategies for mentees and their organizations, these experienced communicators created a space to reflect more deeply on their own communications practice. In doing so, mentors learned from each other and created an outlet for “visioning and venting” around the role of communications in transformative change. This collaboration had a multiplier effect as mentors continued to work with the foremost progressive advocacy and political organizations in the nation.

“I was able to utilize skills I have learned through ReFrame [to help] other organizations that I am a part of as well. I designed an introduction to strategic communications workshop for a training for young API youth in Los Angeles who want to learn more about organizing.”

Emi Vallega
Pilipino Workers Center
ReFrame's program design and curricula must find the sweet spot between strategy and technical expertise.

According to ReFrame’s director, Joseph Phelan, “ReFrame doesn’t just train people in communications skills; it teaches them to use communication skills strategically.” ReFrame might best be understood as a program focused on developing strategists through the lens of communications skill building.

With this orientation, we can see how a communicator might have strong writing skills but lack the strategic and political analysis to apply those writing skills effectively. While the program led with strategy and provided some skills training, the mentees asked for more emphasis on “brass tacks” or “hard skills.” Several allies pointed out that there are few existing venues to learn the pragmatic side of social justice communications, especially with respect to earned media and press work skills.

LESSONS

We highlight five key takeaways and offer recommendations for refining and directing the ReFrame Mentorship program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use the ReFrame core competencies to develop “hard skills” trainings and tools that emphasize the strategic application of those skills.
- Increase the emphasis on these practical skills in the opening convening, and design clinics on specific skills.
- Focus monthly cohort calls, as well as alumni calls, on skill and tool sharing.
- Structure weekly mentor calls to cover “skill of the week” coaching in addition to strategy, leadership and troubleshooting.
- Devote more time to political analysis to help participants apply communications skills the right way, at the right time.
ReFrame mentees cannot create organizational change alone, and ReFrame should not be the only capacity-building process they pursue. Program participation should include both mentees and champions, and must be combined with other supports and infrastructure development for lasting change.

For organizations to integrate strategic (rather than tactical) communications, decision-makers in the organization must have or must develop a deep commitment to communications strategy. This means making time for the steps involved with day-to-day communications work, and positioning the organization and its affiliates to seize and create media opportunities.

Further, strategic communications is best integrated into organizations when the primary person responsible for communications is given positional power. In other words, when the organization’s culture and structure shifts to place this person in a leadership position — or, at least, working closely and regularly with the organization’s leaders.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ReFrame can mentor both mentees and organizational “champions” to increase their understanding of strategic communications as a core strategy and to bring other decision-makers in the organization up to speed.
- Amplify the program’s results by:
  - Connecting mentees and alumni with additional training opportunities through partners, such as the Center for Story-based Strategy, Women’s Media Center, The OpEd Project and Opportunity Agenda, as well as with organizer training programs that integrate communications, such as Western States Center.
  - Providing mentees with the funds and program support to attend and report back from communications conferences, such as Allied Media Conference, Web of Change, NetRoots and the Frank Gathering.
  - Providing additional communications consulting to support research and framing, communications capacity building, and executive coaching in strategic communications.
Expectations and goals for organizational change must be tailored and based on existing organizational conditions and capacity.

In year one, ReFrame used an organizational assessment tool that generated more data than we could revisit. We decided not to use this tool in 2016. We found, however, that this step is necessary. Assessing organizational readiness at the outset helps organizations set realistic communications goals that account for existing organizational barriers.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
- Bring back a simplified version of the organizational assessment; look at organizational age, staffing, structure, experience with strategic communications and flexibility to determine opportunities and barriers for integration within each participating organization.
- Develop and share case studies of organizations that have successfully integrated communications and organizing.
- Refine the Communications Integration Spectrum and Organizational Change Arc so they are more detailed and help leaders articulate clearer goals and levers for change. This can also help maximize champion engagement and support.
- Create realistic expectations of organizational transformation; take a “long game” perspective with smaller changes in the short-term.

Alumni benefit from continued engagement with their cohort as they grow and tackle challenges in their work and organizations.

Alumni participation in monthly calls was consistent, and despite some capacity and logistics challenges, alumni overwhelmingly indicated the desire for continued engagement with ReFrame. Many referred to ReFrame as a “family” they looked to for support and ongoing development they could not get elsewhere, including from within their organizations.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
- Support alumni growth by developing tools for continued practice beyond the mentorship training period.
- Facilitate deeper exchanges and support alumni to become communications trainers for staff in other organizations.
- Facilitate peer mentoring among alumni, and pair new and old alumni to foster new learning spaces.
- Convene alumni and the current cohort with other social justice communicators.
Both mentees and alumni expressed struggling with work/life balance, burnout and boundaries.

Communications staff are asked to do a lot — and quickly. Mentees are stepping into larger workloads and alumni expressed that this trend continues. Many are playing multiple roles while being asked to start or ramp-up communications within their organizations. The cohorts found that their calls and the convenings helped them get through difficult times. They value these relationships and any opportunities to deepen them may contribute to their retention and success over the long term.

RECOMMENDATIONS
• Develop training on how to “push back” productively when it comes to work-planning.
• Provide training on realistic goal-setting and clear reporting.
• Bring back the midpoint cohort convening since relationship-building is a highly valued asset for participants.
AFTER TWO SUCCESSFUL YEARS, REFRAME WILL CONTINUE its core programming and will expand to develop even more skilled on-the-ground strategists. Based on findings from the evaluation, we are currently planning for improvement and expansion in the following areas:

- Developing additional technical skills training, including workshops on earned media, digital media and multimedia production.
- Creating a train-the-trainers curriculum, including core competency modules and an upgrade of the ReFrame Toolkit.
- Providing advanced and continuing education opportunities to alumni and others in the field, including co-sponsorship of an advanced political communications fellowship in partnership with Anat Shenker-Osorio Communications.

These improvements will help us develop strategists who are also technicians and trainers, a necessary combination of skills in small organizations where one communications person is often responsible for leading the work, implementing the work and training others.

In addition, in 2017, ReFrame may also undertake work in the following areas to address critical needs in the field:

- Framing and narrative research analysis in partnership with grassroots networks and alliances.
- Building and convening a ReFrame Network of communications strategists.
• Writing and providing thought-leadership for the field, particularly on communications strategies that center racial, gender and global justice, and on critical movement issues that require more strategic communications intervention.
• Coordinating alumni rapid response to add capacity at key movement moments.

These are all elements of a robust progressive communications ecosystem that are desperately needed. Now, more than ever, ReFrame is committed to responding to movement needs and building on its successes.

There remains, however, a deep need for investment in higher-level strategic communications that is reflective of ground-up visions and solutions. Now, more than ever, the social justice field must move forward in a new way. With the proper investment, this new generation can help us transcend our silos, devise framing strategies based on cognitive and social science research, and build the persuasive power necessary to defend our gains and advance visionary narratives that reframe what’s possible, even in the hardest of times.

**ReFrame is ready to expand its work as part of the solution.**

With more sophisticated leadership internal to our movements, we can better partner with digital organizers, better utilize new media outlets and better leverage progressive PR firms to advance our values. With more sophisticated leadership internal to our movements we can replace tacticians with strategists.
The ReFrame Mentorship is cultivating individual and organizational transformation and seeding the potential for more effective communications across the social justice field. Mentees graduate from ReFrame with an expanded support network, including expert communications strategists, and with the theory, tools and experience to apply communications strategy to their campaigns. ReFrame alumni gain increased personal/professional leadership capacity, increased strategy and planning skills, and an expanded set of tools to begin integrating communications as a core strategy.

The ReFrame Mentorship produced significant impacts for mentee leadership development and their organizations’ social justice work. This was most clearly demonstrated in mentees’ contributions to critical campaign victories in 2016 (for example, the California Domestic Worker Bill of Rights, California state bills on climate justice, the Freedom Now day of action, and the Illinois Domestic Workers Bill of Rights).

Yet, focusing solely on discrete campaigns means missing the forest for the trees. In keeping with our commitment to do things differently, ReFrame is changing how the social justice field measures communications success by prioritizing and evaluating longer-term change. The ReFrame evaluation process and the individual, organizational and network metrics of success were designed to measure both these immediate and cumulative impacts — and indicators are positive.
The real impact of our leadership development work will be seen over the next 5 to 10 years as ReFrame alumni play pivotal roles in shaping narrative fights across the country. ReFrame participants will undoubtedly find themselves in positions of increasing influence. They are now more equipped with a strategic framework, infrastructure-development experience and concrete skills to foster both short-term and long-term social change.

This investment in longer-term impact is long overdue. While we have been outpaced by the Right in recent years, we are not starting from scratch. We are building upon the work of the Left’s prime movers, whose work we must bring to scale through more rigorous investment and coordination. These leaders include Makani Themba, Charlotte Ryan, Lori Dorfman, Karen Jeffreys, Malkia Cyril and Jen Soriano. We are also building on the work of important institutions that have trained and supported social justice communicators, including: Praxis Project, MRAP, The Berkeley Media Studies Group, the Center for Media Justice, the Center for Story-based Strategy, Progressive Communicators Network, and the Spin Academy.

We are also energized to see the growth of powerful digital organizing in the racial and gender justice sectors, thanks to Color of Change, 18MillionRising, Presente, MomsRising, Ultraviolet and sister training programs such as the Kairos Fellowship and New Media Mentor. Meanwhile, new media institutions, such as Mic, The Establishment and Buzzfeed, are rejecting so-called journalistic objectivity to apply a social justice frame to reporting and content production.

When combined with new and enduring leadership development and capacity-building initiatives on the progressive communications front, including ReFrame, Center for Media Justice, Center for Story-based Strategy and Opportunity Agenda, we are primed to mobilize a higher level of strategic impact for the social justice field.

The stakes for social justice communications are high. They have always been high, and now our nation is at a precipice. Will we be able to mobilize the majority toward justice and against Trumpism in all its forms? Will we be able to defend Black lives, Muslim lives, immigrant lives, transgender lives, disabled lives, while advancing a larger narrative that unifies our issues and advances a common vision about our role in governance and a better global economy?

At ReFrame, we say YES. To do so, we need new and highly-skilled leaders with the confidence and capacity to vision, implement and influence. Within this context, ReFrame’s work to develop a network of new grassroots communications strategists is critical to a just future.
APPENDIX A

LIST OF MENTEES, ALUMNI & MENTORS

2016 MENTEES
Aimee Castenell OUR Walmart
Emilyn Vallega Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), National Domestic Workers Alliance member
Hodan Hassan Got Green, Grassroots Global Justice Alliance member
Jonathan Alingu Central Florida Jobs with Justice (CFJwJ), Jobs with Justice affiliate
Julia Beebe Matahari Women Workers’ Center, National Domestic Workers Alliance member
Kay Cuajunco California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA)
L’Errêt Aliith BYP100
Lonnie Barlow PUSH Buffalo
Stephanie Gasca Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL), National Guestworker Alliance affiliate
Tori Cress Idle No More

2015 ALUMNI
Brandon King Cooperation Jackson, Climate Justice Alliance member
Jacob Swenson-Lengyel People’s Action
Joyce Lam Chinese Progressive Association, National Guestworker Alliance affiliate
Keith Brooks ALIGN New York, Jobs with Justice affiliate
Maria Myotte Restaurant Opportunities Center United
Natalia Berthet Garcia Massachusetts Jobs with Justice, Jobs with Justice affiliate
Shelley Ruzicka Arise Chicago, National Domestic Workers Alliance member
Sydney Fang Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Climate Justice Alliance member
Tim Buckingham Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Climate Justice Alliance member

MENTORS
Jen Soriano ReFrame Programming Co-Director
Joseph Phelan ReFrame Director
Jung Hee Choi KFB Consulting
Kimberly Freeman Brown Blackbird
Mervyn Marcano Social Justice Fund Northwest
Naomi Ishisaka Black Lives Matter Global Network
Shanelle Matthews

OPERATIONS
Alejandro Cantagallo

INCUBATORS & FISCAL SPONSORS
Center for Story-based Strategy
Center for Civic Policy
### APPENDIX B

## SUMMARY OF DATA COLLECTION METHODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Tool</th>
<th>Focus/Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BASELINE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Mentee preparedness and goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org assessment</td>
<td>Org capacity baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCA (plan for org change)</td>
<td>Org vision and impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal assessment</td>
<td>Mentee capacity baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCA (plan for personal change)</td>
<td>Mentee vision and impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ONGOING CALLS &amp; MIDPOINT EVAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor/Mentee questions</td>
<td>Tracking progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Reflection calls (monthly)</td>
<td>Capturing program progress and challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentee calls</td>
<td>Capturing progress/course adjusting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champion calls</td>
<td>Capturing progress/course adjusting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor calls</td>
<td>Capturing progress/course adjusting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLOSING CONVENING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentee:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Final written survey</td>
<td>Final data point: revisit specific skill development, go back to application and PCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Final oral eval</td>
<td>Brainstorm about future and the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Convening conversations</td>
<td>Collecting examples, finding themes of stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Interviews at convening</td>
<td>Deeper dive on transformative stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Ignite talks</td>
<td>An opportunity to share with each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentor:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Final oral eval</td>
<td>Meta program eval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Final written eval</td>
<td>Short-select questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alumni:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Final oral eval</td>
<td>Continued impact of ReFrame post program (leadership and skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Final written eval</td>
<td>Short-select questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPETENCY</td>
<td>DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Development</td>
<td>Translate a strategy into a campaign that can be executed by a clear set of actors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications Strategy Development</td>
<td>Define goals, objectives and actions to accomplish them using named resources over a particular period of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue and Media Research</td>
<td>Conduct issue, narrative and audience research to strengthen communications strategy and content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framing, Narrative and Messaging Content</td>
<td>Understand the meta frames and narratives that impact the feasibility of winning particular campaigns, and develop frames and narratives that place campaigns in a broader arc in order to create short-term wins and long-term victories. Translating frames and narratives to messages, sound bites and images that can be both tailored to specific audiences and used across a wide variety of vehicles to advance campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications Planning</td>
<td>Create a set of tactics to move overall campaign and communications strategy, timelined to take advantage of organizational, campaign and external opportunities. Ensure the set of tactics is strategic, measurable and doable (fits existing capacity).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Digital Platforms</td>
<td>Develop technical know-how to manage content on all online platforms to support overall communications strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Work</td>
<td>Place stories (earn media) in print, broadcast and online outlets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Writing</td>
<td>Produce written “owned media” including opinion writing, blogs and feature writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Multimedia Production Skills</td>
<td>Produce audio image and video “owned media.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokesperson Skills</td>
<td>Conduct and train others to conduct short-, medium- and long-form interviews and debates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid Response</td>
<td>Convene a rapid response team to evaluate risk vs. opportunity in urgent developments and to execute a rapid response plan accordingly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and Analytics</td>
<td>Conduct overall and ongoing evaluation of communications strategies, campaigns and tactics. Design and implement instruments to collect evaluation and analytics data around communications impact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Transformative Qualities of a Strategic Communicator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUALITY</th>
<th>DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>SAMPLE BENCHMARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visionary</td>
<td>Engage future possibility with wisdom and creativity.</td>
<td>Learn about current circumstance, seek out creative solutions to existing and future problems. Set up strategy to accomplish goals and move work toward larger vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact-Oriented</td>
<td>Take actions (individually and collectively) to foster maximum predictable change, with awareness to take advantage of unforeseen outcomes to accomplish goals.</td>
<td>Understand best practices for developing strategy and ensuring tactics are aligned with strategy. Measure conditions pre-action, mid-action and post-action. Flexibility to redesign strategy to maximize resources and impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>Conduct communications from internal feelings of security and leadership.</td>
<td>Embody role of advocating for communications strategy and integration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Recognize that communications must be done in collaboration, not alone.</td>
<td>Embrace role as fulcrum of internal communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Initiate and facilitate collaborative strategy and planning, and collaborative implementation of communications. Use group facilitation and training skills to build participatory communications culture and to engage other staff in communications work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Organizational Capacities of a Strategic Communications Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAPACITY</th>
<th>DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>SAMPLE BENCHMARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Learning around communications is built into the individual and group practices of staff and members.</td>
<td>Willingness to have communications inform overall organizing and organizational strategy and vice versa. Communications evaluation integrated into existing evaluation processes. Ongoing training for staff and members. Tracking trends in technology and theory advances. Feedback mechanisms for projects, work, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications Leadership</td>
<td>Organization Leadership understands and takes action on the importance of communications as a core strategy for their organization and their movement.</td>
<td>Org leadership prioritizes external communications strategy in planning and decision-making, and allots necessary funding and time for doing impactful external communications. Capacity to be a thought leader and possible trainer/capacity lender in strategic communications for ally organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Communications is threaded throughout the organization's structures, actions and human resources.</td>
<td>Move from Tadpole toward Meerkat on Integration Spectrum. Communications strategy and planning does not rest on just one person. Communications discussions on strategy, framing/narrative, research and/or evaluation, as opposed to just tactics development, integrated into planning meetings. Communicators are included in strategic conversations. Job descriptions have communications roles clearly indicated. Communications strategy and planning and relevant core competencies are built into membership development. Relevant shared comms infrastructure is developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated Impact</td>
<td>The ability for an organization to identify the impact they want to have and capitalize on the impact they actually have.</td>
<td>Campaign plans that track theory of change, evaluate actions’ effectiveness toward accomplishing change, and document lessons learned from both success and failure. Ability to point to particular changes and claim responsibility based on actions. Ability to assess impact even when not a clear campaign victory, e.g., impacts in the realm of leadership development, culture change, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### BENCHMARKS OF ORGANIZATIONAL SECTOR IMPACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Definition/Description</th>
<th>Sample Benchmarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Coalition/Alliance Communications Strategy</td>
<td>Organization leads or supports coalition/alliance-wide communications strategy to support coalition/alliance campaign or coalition/alliance change goals.</td>
<td>Media research for coalition/alliance. Development of joint comms initiatives. Shared narrative development. Collaborative comms evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Coalition/Alliance Communications Infrastructure</td>
<td>Organization leads or participates in coalition/alliance communications committee and/or provides access and training on communications infrastructure to other coalition/alliance members.</td>
<td>Coalition/alliance communications team. Internal communications protocols and technology platforms (if needed). Shared tools including: Coalition/alliance social media platforms. Shared press database or press lists. Shared media monitoring tools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligned Coalition/Alliance Rapid Response Communications</td>
<td>Organization leads or participates in rapid response communications in anticipation of or response to opposition or internal threats.</td>
<td>Coalition/alliance rapid response team including reps of steering/coordinating committee. Coalition/alliance rapid response decision making process. Coalition/alliance rapid response plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Capacity for Coalition/Alliance Communications Implementation</td>
<td>Organization contributes communications capacity for implementation of coalition/alliance communications work.</td>
<td>Dedicated organizational comms rep to coalition/alliance. Clear roles for comms rep to contribute to work based on individual’s strengths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### BENCHMARKS OF INDIVIDUAL/ORGANIZATIONAL FIELD IMPACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Definition/Description</th>
<th>Sample Benchmarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased Relationships with Other Progressive Communicators</td>
<td>Individual(s) are connected to other progressive communicators including strategists and media producers.</td>
<td>Increased number of progressive communicator contacts. Increase in peer-sharing with other progressive communicators. Participation in ReFrame alumni activities and/or other progressive communicator activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought Leadership Around Organizing Communications</td>
<td>Individual(s) represent the organization in sharing communications lessons that contribute to the progressive communications and social justice fields.</td>
<td>Producing and distributing case studies/lessons learned on communications. Participating in conferences, panels, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Understanding of and Access to Progressive Comms Institutions and Infrastructure</td>
<td>Individual(s) understand landscape of progressive communications institutions and know how to access relevant services and tools.</td>
<td>Progressive comms institutions integrated into organizational database. Progressive comms institutions accessed for relevant tools, peer exchange and services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1. We are defining sector as the part of the social justice field that is focused on the organization’s primary issue areas (e.g., worker justice sector, climate justice sector). We assume here that the main vehicle for affecting sector-wide change is through sector-specific coalitions and alliances.

2. We are defining field as the progressive communications field. In the long-term, ReFrame seeks to affect the makeup of the progressive communications field to increase the number of people of color and community organizing-based communicators (as opposed to white and advocacy-based) participating in both the communications and social justice fields at large.