MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

REPORT

2024-2025

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Memphis as a City of Advocacy and Organizing

There is a rich—and courageous—history of advocacy and community organizing in Memphis, Tennessee, that dates back to its early years. It is largely an unfamiliar through line in our city's history, telling the story of a people who valiantly pushed for change in the face of a system designed specifically to prevent it and to stop their own self-determination.

Whatever they confronted—oppression, a massacre, lynchings, a political boss, and Jim Crow—generations of Memphians covertly but always persistently defied pressures, racism, and violent opposition to advocate for better lives and to organize to control their own destinies.

This history inspires us today as Memphians build on this heritage to define and mobilize today's advocacy and organizing movement. **If there is any prevailing theme that can be taken from 160 years of Memphis advocacy and organizing, it is this: All things are possible.** Despite overwhelming barriers, African Americans have relentlessly pushed towards their north star—full rights, equality, and opportunity—and proved that progress can be made.

The history of Memphis is crowded with chapters of people with the courage to speak truth to power even at risk of their own lives. For example, in the ultimate act of advocacy, 7,000 African Americans in Union-controlled Memphis joined the Union army. Many returned at the end of the war to experience the Memphis Massacre of 1866 and the rigid segregation of the times. African Americans were confined to specific parts of the city, many of which they turned into centers of business and community. The Beale Street area became a nationally known center of Black culture and commerce.

During Reconstruction, scores of African American men registered to vote and successfully ran for local and state offices. Along with the end of Reconstruction came yellow fever epidemics that decimated Memphis. Robert Church, a legendary Black entrepreneur, formerly enslaved, stepped up to buy the first bonds to restore the city's charter. He attacked the strictures of the time by building quality public facilities (such as the 1899 construction of Church Park and Auditorium) for Black Memphians excluded from white facilities, and his bank gave loans to entrepreneurs and for housing. His prominence was underscored when President Theodore Roosevelt spoke at Church Auditorium in 1902.

In the late 19th century, Memphis had four African American newspapers, the most famous published by Ida B. Wells. She heroically editorialized against lynchings and reported violence against Black Memphians. After her offices were ransacked, she had to leave the city for fear of her life. Around the same time, African Americans organized around education, transforming the "Sabbath schools" into 11 elementary schools, one high school, and two post-secondary institutions with departments in medicine, law, dentistry, pharmacy, and nursing. In the early 20th century, Robert Church Jr. gained national prominence when he formed the Lincoln League to organize African American political power, backing it up with voter drives and voting schools and by paying poll taxes.

Progress escalated in the wake of the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that "separate but equal" schools were unconstitutional. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke in 1959 at Mason Temple in support of the Volunteer Ticket's campaign for its all-African American ballot in that year's city election. None of the candidates on the ticket won election, but there was no question that the times were changing and a new urgency to advocate and organize had been unleashed. Within a few years, segregation had ended on buses and in libraries and at the zoo, but it took until 1962 for 13 African American first graders to integrate four previously all-white city schools.

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Memphis as a City of Advocacy and Organizing (cont.)

Advocacy and organizing were at the heart of the 1968 strike by 1,300 sanitation workers. The strike attracted national media attention and led Dr. King to come to Memphis to fight for the workers' right to unionize. When he was murdered here on April 4, 1968, it cast a shadow over the city that has not ever completely lifted. It also inspired stepped-up calls for more jobs for African Americans at white-owned businesses, for Black representation on the Memphis City Schools board, and fuller representation in government.

Change regularly required pickets, boycotts, and Black Mondays when 67,000 students did not attend school, showing their support of the demand for African American representation on the school board.

Elections in Memphis have long told the tale of struggle and pursuit of fair representation in Memphis and Shelby County as it has progressed in becoming a majority Black city and county, with a trajectory towards a majority in the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) in a few years. While African Americans made political gains during Reconstruction, A.W. Willis Jr became the first elected official in the 1900s winning a 1964 election for state representative. In 1974, Harold Ford Sr. was elected as the first Black representative from Tennessee to the U.S. Congress.

The 1990s would see the clear beginnings of African American gains in local elected offices where court cases, restructuring, and redistricting would continually play significant roles. In 1992, Memphis' first elected Black mayor, Willie W. Herenton, took office. Ten years later (2002), the first elected Black Shelby County mayor, AC Wharton, took office, but it would take another 16 years (2018) before the majority of countywide offices reflected the race and party of the full county.

There is a direct line that runs from Memphis' legacy of advocacy and organizing to the historic number of organizations today pursuing a better, fairer city and goals that could only be imagined by past generations. **In this way, it can be said today that Memphis is in a golden era of advocacy and organizing.** Never have so many organizations been determined to improve their city and to uplift the lives of citizens who have long been denied a voice and opportunities to shape their own future.

In this way, the Memphis Advocacy & Community Organizing Survey can act as a propulsion system for supercharging the myriad efforts under way. It can inspire new collaborations, new funding, and new outcomes. **In that way, it responds directly to Dr. King's mandate: "The movement lives or dies in Memphis."**

This is our why. Community organizing and advocacy are needed now more than ever in Memphis and beyond. The poverty rate in Memphis is one of the highest in the country, gun violence is on the rise, and inequities in quality education persist.

Organizing and advocacy are powerful ways to identify community priorities and activate directly impacted people, community members, stakeholders, and leaders to create the change they want to see. Through shared visioning, coalition building, and policy-and-systems change, we can build a city full of opportunity for all. This report highlights groups across a spectrum of issues and populations served and includes those that are new and those that have been doing the work for years.

Objective & Background

The Memphis Advocacy & Community Organizing Survey was commissioned by a group of advocacy organizations and funders coordinated by Stand for Children Tennessee in the winter of 2024 to learn more about the range of nonprofit advocacy in Memphis, Tennessee. This report highlights focus areas, approaches, barriers, support needed, and other challenges and opportunities from organizations directly involved in building a better Memphis community.

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Objective & Background (cont.)

Our aim is that insights gained will inform local, state, and national funders on how they can provide assistance, foster coordination, and identify opportunities to support advocacy and organizing efforts in Memphis. We borrowed the definition of advocacy from Bolder Advocacy and shared this definition with participating organizations: "'Advocacy' encompasses a broad range of activities that can influence public policy (including research, public education, lobbying, and voter education)."

Why Does Systems Change Matter?

Right now, the U.S. is facing new heights of inequity. Economic inequality has been a persistent problem in the modern era of the U.S., but following the global COVID-19 pandemic, income inequality grew. While wealth increased for the highest-earning white families, wealth declined for Black and Hispanic/Latinx families. There is a shortage of affordable housing, and rent has gone up about 24%. The nation's violent crime rates are decreasing, yet our incarceration rate is one of the highest in the world. All the while, we're facing a climate crisis as our planet continues to warm and the impacts are being felt by our communities.

These issues are particularly pronounced in Memphis, where many problems are often more severe. The racial gap in incomes has remained doggedly the same since 1970, with the median family income of white Shelby County families twice the median family income of African American families. Despite the significant impact of COVID-19 on Memphis, it was recently reported that Memphis received less federal stimulus support when compared to peer cities. Our city's poverty rate is nearly double the national average. The child poverty rate too is nearly twice the national average. One in seven adults reads below a sixth-grade level, and we have a shortage of about 36,000 affordable housing units.

Memphis also has consistently ranked among the most violent cities in America. Memphis can be found at the top of most lists for chronic diseases, and a recent report by MLK50: Justice Through Journalism highlighted high lead exposure in Memphis and its correlation to higher crime.

Systems change is crucial as we face this intractable level of inequality. Rather than offering band-aid solutions with only short-term impact, systems thinking fundamentally addresses and changes the root causes of the issues. Additionally, systems and their impacts are deeply interconnected. A holistic approach can cause ripple effects across various systems and large-scale problems. For example, as we lift more people out of poverty, we're likely to see the crime rate drop.

The existing structures and approaches weren't created overnight. In the same vein, we must enact changes that are comprehensive and create lasting impacts. We do this by transforming the underlying conditions that perpetuate these long-standing issues and their intensification due to the persistence of the status quo.

What Role Can Philanthropy Play ?

Through strategic investment in systems-change efforts, philanthropy can maximize its impact on the problems plaguing our communities. While the majority of traditional charitable efforts focus on direct service, prioritizing funding to support the restructuring of institutions that fuel inequality and injustice can bring investments to scale.

How Are Movements Built?

Typically, issues come to a head through a motivating central event and/or when directly impacted people and allies say enough is enough. They put their heads together, develop a shared vision and demands, and begin building out their strategy and coalition. They raise awareness, organize communities to get involved, take collective action, and pressure decision-makers towards a breakthrough solution. To broaden their base of support, they build coalitions among diverse leaders, groups, and stakeholders who share common goals.

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How are movements built? (cont.)

They create a movement that uses a variety of tactics, such as storytelling, direct action, media engagement, canvassing, phone banking, and more to drive momentum and progress.

Building an impactful and successful campaign requires a significant amount of resources—whether that be connections, training, or funding. Every part of the work requires financial investment. Grassroots organizers without funding support may simply volunteer their time, which often represents a financial sacrifice. When an organization wants to mobilize community members to take action, they have to engage in outreach; this usually requires capital to mobilize constituents that they don't have personal relationships with (i.e., phone banking, canvassing, mass mailers, etc.). **If we want our movements to succeed, they need financial support, training support, and relational support.**

The Impact of Movements in Memphis

Just in the last ten years, Memphis has seen a surge in advocacy and community organizing for social, economic, and environmental justice. In 2021, Memphis Community Against Pollution, Protect Our Aquifer, and hundreds of community members and partners effectively stopped the Byhalia Pipeline from being built in historically Black neighborhoods in South Memphis. They also passed laws protecting the Memphis Sands Aquifer and neighborhoods from future oil pipeline construction.

Last year, Decarcerate Memphis, the Official Black Lives Matter Memphis chapter, and several partnering organizations mobilized to pass six laws for police accountability within Memphis Police Department and the Shelby County Sheriff's Office after the murder of Tyre Nichols by MPD.

Starbucks workers in the summer of 2022 voted to unionize the first Starbucks in Memphis—only the second store in Tennessee—after seven workers were fired in retaliation for their organizing efforts. As of this writing, the lawsuit brought by the National Labor Relations Board regarding their firings has been heard by the Supreme Court and is awaiting decision. It is reported to be a case that "could completely change the U.S. labor power balance."

Most recently, Memphis For All, Equity Alliance, Stand for Children TN, and MICAH joined a statewide coalition that stopped a voucher bill that would have shifted funding away from public school systems. These education advocacy organizations and more also championed a transparent, community-centered process for the selection of the new Memphis-Shelby County Schools superintendent following a year-long national search and the unjust ban of activists from school board meetings.

These efforts are only a few of many in recent years. There have been major pushes for expanded funding in public transit, affordable housing, neighborhoods, police and criminal justice reforms, living wages for workers, and more. **Memphis is leading some of the most groundbreaking and impactful work in the South. As our movement gains access to more resources, the possibilities for the future of our city and the South are limited only by our courage, our ambitions, and collaboration for progressive change.**

Statewide Context on Advocacy & Organizing

In spite of the wins on behalf of advocates and organizers in Memphis, the GOP supermajority legislature in Tennessee has overridden many of the systemic changes that advocates and organizers have worked hard to secure or have planned to pursue.

Just in the last few years, living wages, bail reforms, red flag laws, meaningful criminal justice reforms, and rental property regulations have been preempted by state bills—many of which have targeted advocacy efforts in Memphis specifically.

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Statewide Context on Advocacy & Organizing

In 2023, the state legislature expelled two Black democratically elected representatives for protesting the general assembly's inaction on the House floor after the Covenant School shooting in Nashville took the lives of six people, including three children. Nashville Representative Justin Jones and Memphis Representative Justin J. Pearson were quickly reelected to their positions by voters in their districts. Despite constitutional questions, the legislature passed a bill this year aimed at African American colleagues to prevent the reappointment of expelled representatives by local legislative bodies.

Furthermore, the legislature has sought for the last few years to pass bills to criminalize the exercising of First Amendment rights through protest. A bill was proposed this year to increase the penalty for obstructing a highway, a common charge for protesters. Although it did not pass, a bill considered in 2021 would have offered immunity for some drivers who strike protesters.

In 2022 University of Washington political science professor Jake Grumback developed the first-ever study to **rank the health of democracy in each state**. *Tennessee ranked last*.

Memphis change agents face unique barriers that make it all the more difficult to drive progress for more safety, justice, and opportunity in our community. Concerns about quality of life indicators require important and definitive action for improvement.

TARGETED EFFORTS TO UNDERMINE ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING IN MEMPHIS INDICATE AN URGENT NEED FOR INCREASED INVESTMENTS IN THIS WORK.

Nationwide Context on Advocacy & Organizing

In Memphis and throughout Tennessee, the challenges we're witnessing are deeply intertwined with the broader systemic issues and anti-democratic trends sweeping across the United States.

Often dismissed as mere "culture wars," systemic and political attacks on basic rights pose grave threats to the rights and safety of marginalized communities, particularly BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, & People of Color), women, youth, low-income individuals, and LGBTQ+ individuals. In response to the growing movements for racial justice, especially following the tragic deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of law enforcement, forces against diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are gaining momentum.

Recent actions by the Tennessee state legislature, such as the vote to remove the board for Tennessee State University—the sole state-funded HBCU—and attempts to undermine the Memphis-Shelby County Schools board that governs education in a majority Black city, underscore this concerning trend. Lastly, the national efforts to ban books and teaching about BIPOC and LGBTQ+ history, issues, and experiences have been especially prevalent in Tennessee, with the state leading the charge.

The battleground for these efforts lies primarily in the South, with Tennessee often setting the precedent for similar regressive laws across the nation. Not only this, but more funding and resources are directed to political swing states, thereby excluding Tennessee, a non-swing state. While this funding is primarily for political campaigning, it also supports voter registration and engagement initiatives that can build advocacy and organizing infrastructure and capacity. Campaign workers and volunteers gain valuable skills in mobilization, communication, and coalition building, which are essential for advocacy. Campaigns also build networks, raise issue awareness, and generate resources that can be redirected to support broader advocacy initiatives.

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Nationwide Context on Advocacy & Organizing

Large funders and foundations are recognizing the urgency and importance of investing in the South, and that "the funding must be consistent, and it must be patient," as described by Tameka Greer, Executive Director of Memphis Artists for Change.

Other states, like Colorado—whose landscape assessment was instrumental in the construction of our survey and report—echo this sentiment. Colorado's assessment emphasizes the need for long-term, unrestricted grants with more inclusive funding opportunities to support successful organizational outcomes.

One example of how philanthropy can support movement-building is the California Black Freedom Fund, which supports Black-led organizations through "fast, flexible, and responsive philanthropy." This five-year, $100 million initiative provides resources for Black power-building and movement-based organizations, offering the sustained investments necessary to eradicate systemic and institutional racism.

In the South, the Southern Power Fund offers low-barrier grants to groups on the frontline, prioritizing BIPOC-led and multiracial organizing in deep-South states like Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. They've moved over $22.5 million to frontline organizations and provide significant seed funding to 10 projects annually that "present a plan for long-term investment projects like land purchases, housing, community land trusts, and infrastructure development."

These initiatives demonstrate the power of strategic investment in marginalized communities. As W.E.B. Du Bois said **"as the South goes, so goes the nation."**

Given the persistent underinvestment in the South, it's clear that we need more initiatives like these to support and amplify the vital work of advocacy and community organizing. Investing in the South is not just a moral imperative; it's a strategic necessity to overcome the formidable challenges ahead.

Methodology

This survey was commissioned by a group of advocacy organizations and funders coordinated by Stand for Children Tennessee to learn more about the range of nonprofit advocacy and community organizing in Memphis, Tennessee. It is the belief that all Memphians benefit when people who are typically left out of decision-making have the power and opportunity to transform communities. Community organizing is an essential component of creating community-driven change, and because of it, our primary goal was to learn more about the efforts in this area led by grassroots and nonprofit organizations in Memphis.

We hope that the insights gained will enhance support for expansion and increased capacity, foster better coordination, and identify more informed funding opportunities. The information collected will be used to inform grantmakers, advocacy and community organizing groups, and government officials about engagement and outreach strategies, patterns, trends, gaps, opportunities, and recommendations to strengthen the overall advocacy and community organizing landscape.

Two consultants based in Memphis were recruited to lead the project. The consultants brought extensive knowledge and experience in public policy, nonprofit advocacy, nonprofit management, and grassroots organizing, with strong connections to grassroots organizations and nonprofit organizations.

The aim of the project has been to better understand the depth and breadth of organizing and advocacy efforts in Memphis. It was important to capture as many perspectives as possible with a broad range of voices from organizations.

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Methodology (cont.)

A total of 283 nonprofit organizations were identified as potential participants. For the community organizing portion of the survey and interviews, 32 grassroots community organizing groups were also identified.

To identify organizations, the consultants and commissioning organization built a list from personal and professional connections in nonprofit and grassroots organizing spaces and enlisted the support of the Hyde Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Assisi Foundation, Urban Child Institute, and Tennessee Nonprofit Network to share the survey with their networks. The team used LIVEGIVEmidsouth as a resource to ensure an inclusive list of organizations. Fifty-nine organizations chose to take part and complete the survey.

Consultants gathered both quantitative and qualitative data through an online survey (distributed via Survey Monkey) and Zoom interviews with organizational leaders. Interviews used select survey questions and additional questions to dive deeper into participants' current realities and future ambitions.

Survey participation and interview participation were voluntary, and participants were not promised funding in return for their participation. Estimated time for survey completion was 25 minutes, and the survey section on community organizing was optional.

Scheduled reminders were sent out at regular intervals to organizations that had not completed the survey. Team members reached out via phone calls, emails, or social media to all organizations on the grassroots organizing list to ensure adequate representation.

The survey was broken down into the following categories: organization information, geographic scope, target populations, advocacy and community organizing activities, successes and challenges, funding and support, and an optional community organizing portion.

Interviews

Five organizations self-selected to participate in 50-minute virtual interviews conducted via Zoom. Each interview included the respective organization's executive director and a staff member involved in advocacy and organizing efforts. We recorded the interviews with permission. Questions varied between multiple-choice and open-ended. Two team members facilitated a structured interview with 15 questions, with one asking questions and the other taking notes.

Participants were asked to elaborate on the strategies and tactics used in community organizing, and were free to expound upon their survey answers. One participant asked explicitly that any of their quotes be approved by them before inclusion in the report, which we agreed to.

Data Analysis

The team analyzed data from the survey using Survey Monkey and ChatGPT to identify trends, patterns, and correlations. They also explored themes, challenges, and opportunities from the interviews. Consultants verified that any AI-assisted analysis accurately reflected data trends and the input from respondents. Research findings may be limited by sample representativeness and self-reported survey data. Time and resource constraints could affect the research depth. Some participants found the survey too long or faced technical issues. Any potential conflicts of interest were disclosed and managed appropriately.

ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING LANDSCAPE

Types of Advocacy & Community Organizing Groups
All respondents, excluding one, self-identified as 501(c)(3) organizations. Of these organizations, 12% also identified as faith-based, 9% identified as a neighborhood or local group, and 9% identified themselves as engaging in 501(c)(4) (political/lobbying) activities.

1% of respondents also replied "other," including these designations: "PAC," "Local chapter," "Charter Management Organizations (education institution)," "fraternal organization for teenage boys," "509(c)(3)," "community-led efforts intermediary," and "substance use disorder treatment."

Where Advocacy & Community Organizing Are Taking Place
The vast majority of respondents (83%) said they served all areas of Memphis, indicating that many groups have a wide-reaching geographic vision for their efforts.

However, even among groups that serve all of Memphis, there is a higher concentration of work being done in high-poverty areas, like northern and southern Memphis, reflecting the fact that most respondents primarily focus on economic security.

Nearly 60% of respondents selected "Other" when asked about what specific neighborhoods they work in. Most of these organizations answered with some variation of serving all neighborhoods in Memphis and/or Shelby County and that they were not necessarily neighborhood specific. This corresponds with the above data that most organizations serve all of Memphis.

Other responses reflected serving neighborhoods not listed, like Boxtown, West Junction, Uptown, Gaston Park District, Magnolia Castalia, Vollintine Evergreen, and one town right outside of Memphis, Collierville.

Thirty-one of the responding organizations (57%) work in Raleigh, Frayser, Nutbush, and Klondike-Smokey City, which are neighborhoods in northern Memphis. There are 27 organizations (50%) that work in neighborhoods in southern Memphis: Whitehaven, Hickory Hill, Westwood, Soulsville, Parkway Village, and Depot.

Q: WHICH NEIGHBORHOODS IN MEMPHIS ARE YOU CURRENTLY SERVING?
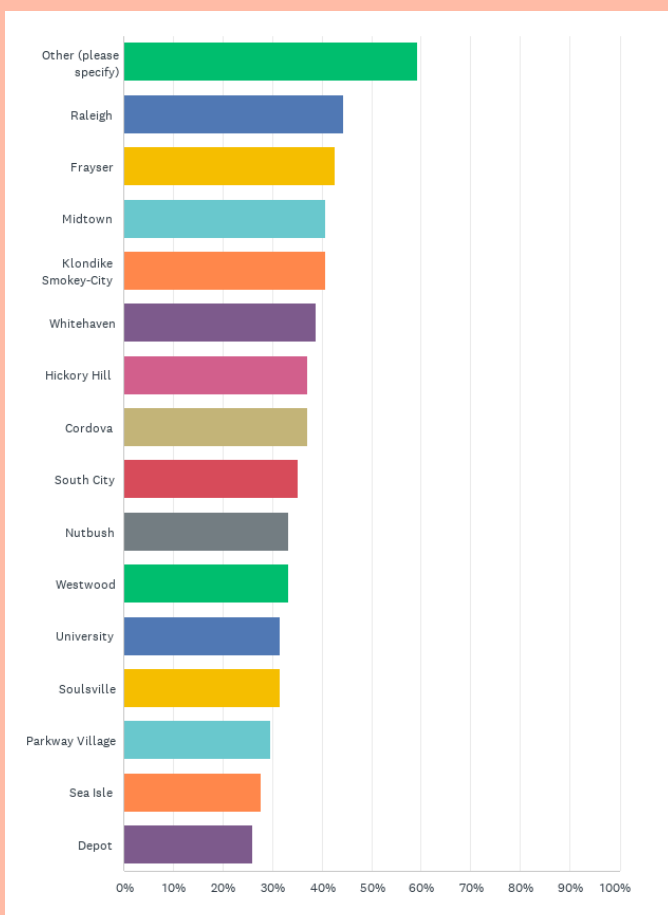
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Priority Populations Served by Advocacy & Community Organizing Entities

The data highlights a significant focus on Black communities, low-income families, and children and youth. Nearly half of the responding organizations who serve Black communities also selected that they serve low-income families. Outside of the top three priority populations selected, Latino/Hispanics are served by 36% of the responding groups, and 61% of these organizations identified that they center efforts on immigrant and refugee populations.

Respondents who answered "Other" described serving "people experiencing food insecurity", "front line environmental sacrifice zone communities", "musicians", "cancer patients", "menstruators", "renters", "police officers and staff", "potential tech-based entrepreneurs", and more.

Engagement with Directly Impacted People

Participants overwhelmingly answered that they work with community members to identify solutions through outreach and relationship building (80%) and develop partnerships between communities and the organization (76%). Under these top two engagement strategies, they also work to elevate the voice of the population served in the decision-making process and build networks among community members with diverse perspectives.

Organizations echoed this data in the virtual interviews by stating they meet with directly impacted people where they are, including apartment complexes and neighborhood meetings. Additionally, they mentioned they intentionally hold meetings to involve impacted communities in the process to inform programmatic development and strategic planning.
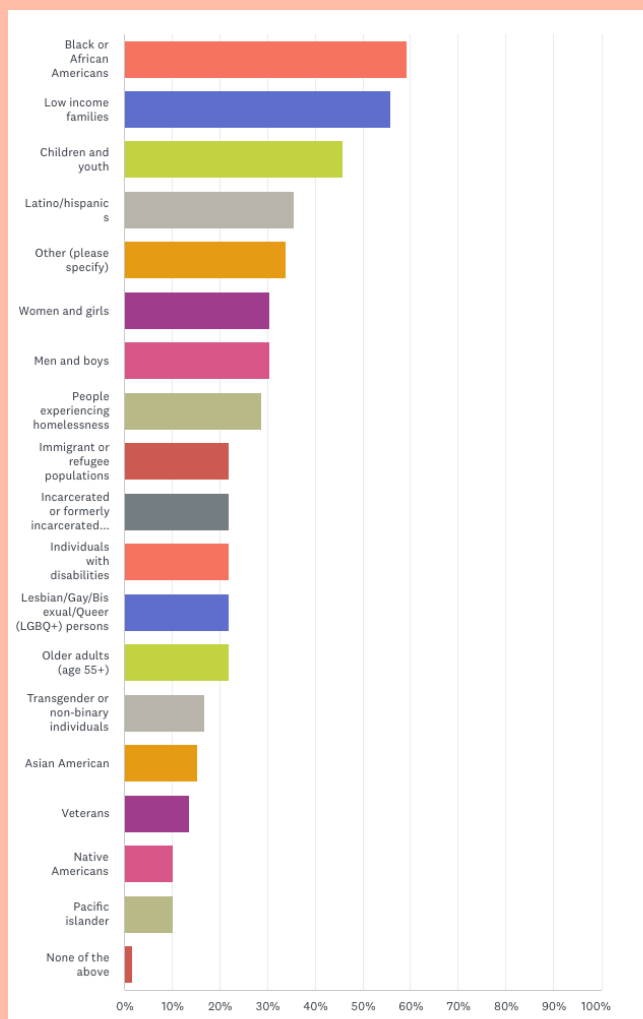
Direct Services Offered

More than half of the survey participants serve Memphis through community outreach. The top two specific categories are educational services (41%) and family support services (37%). Forty-six percent of organizations replied "Other," naming services such as:

- Food access
- Climate change awareness and advocacy
- Entrepreneurship training
- Research and advocacy for best practices to prevent and reduce crime
- Direct voter contact
- Affordable housing

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Direct Services Offered (cont.)
- Capacity building services for nonprofit organizations
- Supportive transitional & permanent housing for veterans experiencing homelessness
- Backbone intermediary
- Addiction recovery
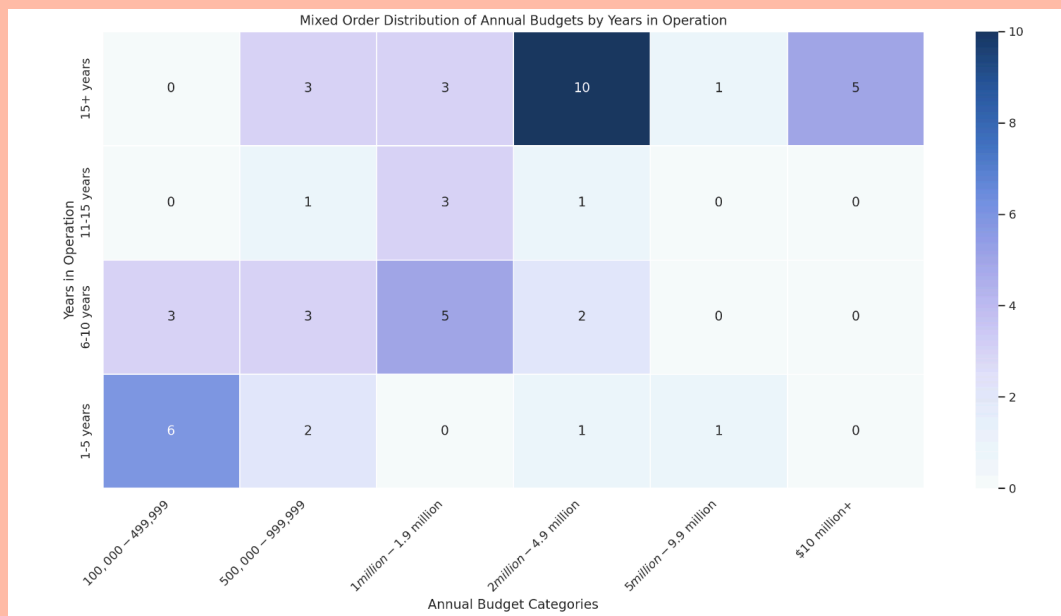
Operating Budgets & Longevity
A significant number of the organizations have extensive history and experience, with the largest number of groups having operated for more than 15 years (39%). The majority of the groups have been in operation for 1-10 years, with 14 organizations (24%) responding that they started within the last five years, and 16 (27%) organizations responding that they had been operating for 6-10 years. About 10% of organizations have been around for 11-15 years, which bridges the gap between relatively new entities and those with a longer-standing presence.

Nearly 46% of organizations have an annual budget of less than $1 million. Forty-two percent of respondents are working with a budget between $1 million and $4.9 million dollars every year. Five organizations have a budget of more than $10 million dollars and only two had between $5 million and $9.9 million.

As might be expected, the trends in the data show that the longer an organization is in operation, the more that their annual budget grows. This data also reflects the anecdotal evidence we heard in interviews from newer organizations that funding is harder to acquire and that **multi-year operational funding is necessary to get operations and programs off the ground more substantially.**

"THE BIG SECRET TO OUR SUCCESS IS THE INVESTMENT THAT THE FOUNDING BOARD MADE IN THE CONCEPT."

DATA VISUAL: ANNUAL BUDGETS COMPARED TO YEARS IN OPERATION

Mixed Order Distribution of Annual Budgets by Years in Operation

Years in Operation	100,000 – 499,999	500,000 – 999,999	1 million – 1.9 million	2 million – 4.9 million	5 million – 9.9 million	$10 million+
15+ years	0	3	3	10	1	5
11-15 years	0	1	3	1	0	0
6-10 years	3	3	5	2	0	0
1-5 years	6	2	0	1	1	0

Annual Budget Categories

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Time and Resources Dedicated & Funding for Advocacy
We asked respondents about the time, staff, and resources they dedicate to advocacy. Most organizations surveyed allocate less than 50% of their resources to advocacy, with the majority dedicating only a small portion of staff time and resources. Only 10% of the organizations are wholly committed to advocacy.

Organizations reported varying levels of time and resources dedicated to advocacy, no matter their annual budget. The organizations that tend to dedicate the least amount of time to advocacy are those with annual budgets between $2 million and $4.9 million.
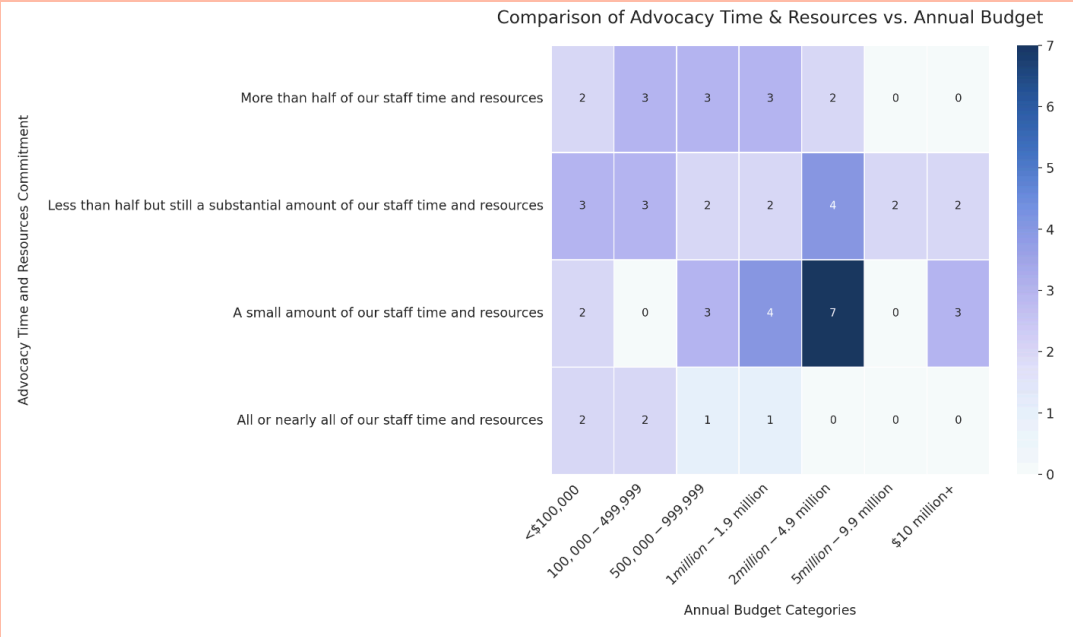
In interviews, it was frequently expressed that the participating organizations desired to have greater involvement in advocacy efforts but needed more capacity to do so (i.e., staff & operating support).

The vast majority of organizations (79%) reported their advocacy efforts are funded by foundations (local or community, national, and family). Nearly half responded that they receive funding for advocacy through personal donations. Some organizations reported receiving funding from local, municipal, or federal governments. More information would be necessary to understand what this means, as most governments cannot directly fund advocacy.

Additionally, 75% of organizations confirmed that funders can better support their advocacy needs by providing funding opportunities. They also voiced that assistance in building connections across and/or between advocacy groups or nonprofit organizations (68%) and general operating support (65%) would be helpful.

When asked if there are ways that funders have been helpful or that funder requirements that have hindered their advocacy work, respondents indicated that flexible funding without restrictions and shifting from written reports to phone or video check-ins have been particularly helpful.

DATA VISUAL: ANNUAL BUDGETS COMPARED ADVOCACY TIME & RESOURCES

Comparison of Advocacy Time & Resources vs. Annual Budget

Advocacy Time and Resources Commitment	<$100,000	100,000 – 499,999	500,000 – 999,999	1million – 1.9 million	2million – 4.9 million	5million – 9.9 million	$10 million+
More than half of our staff time and resources	2	3	3	3	2	0	0
Less than half but still a substantial amount of our staff time and resources	3	3	2	2	4	2	2
A small amount of our staff time and resources	2	0	3	4	7	0	3
All or nearly all of our staff time and resources	2	2	1	1	0	0	0

Annual Budget Categories

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Time and Resources Dedicated & Funding for Advocacy
They emphasized the importance of funding democracy-building work over forced collaborations and appreciated additional funding for projects requiring more staff capacity. However, they noted that overly restrictive grants, lack of general operating support, and micro-managing advocacy strategies were significant hindrances. Unrealistic short-term outcome expectations and the need to rely on donations for advocacy work were also cited as challenges. General operating support was highlighted as highly beneficial, while extensive grant reporting requirements were seen as burdensome.

"THE ABILITY TO USE FUNDS ON WHAT WE NEED AND NOT PUTTING RESTRICTIONS ON FUND USAGE HAS BEEN VERY IMPORTANT."

Priority Issues & Focus Areas
Almost half of participants shared that their advocacy focus is on education (47%). Following education are housing (44%) and racial justice (40%). Organizations who answered "Other" responded that their issue areas include: "community education and outreach regarding community-focused environmental issues," "tech-based economic development and investment," "voting rights, voter access and education," "safety of Collierville citizens," "civic engagement and voter restoration," "affordable housing for Veterans," "mentoring," "lead free," and "period poverty."

Those organizations that focus on education also focus on youth empowerment (67%), violence prevention/safety (52%), economic security (48%), and housing (48%). This corresponds with data by the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth in 2023 that ranks Tennessee 7th in the nation for children who fall victim to firearm-related crimes. Additionally, the trends track with the high childhood poverty rate in Memphis (37.2%).

Respondents who answered that one of their focuses is on housing also shared that they focus on racial justice (68%), economic security (64%), food access (60%), and violence prevention/safety (60%). These co-occurrences fall in line with the fact that Memphis is a majority Black city with a shortage of about 36,000 affordable housing units.

Organizations that checked racial justice as an issue they center on responded that their efforts are also anchored in housing (74%), economic security (57%), and violence prevention/safety (57%). Following these, they equally focus on criminal justice system accountability, education, and healthcare access (52% for each category).

These trends indicate that the majority of groups that concentrate on racial justice also spread their efforts across a multitude of issue areas that are impacting BIPOC Memphians, particularly Black Memphians.

This tells us that investing in organizations dedicated to education, housing, and racial justice can be broadly impactful. Because they address multiple root causes at once, these organizations tackle the main problems affecting our communities.

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Many Memphis advocacy & community organizing groups not only have a clear vision for the future, *they have been effective in moving the needle already.*

Policy Priorities & Vision

The policy priorities from participants reflected a wide range of issue areas. Only 12% of the 43 who answered indicated they do not have any policy priorities for the next 1-2 years, highlighting that **the lion's share of respondents have a clear vision for their efforts in the near future for Memphis and beyond.**

Respondents highlighted several key advocacy priorities across various areas of interest. Environmental concerns included rezoning polluted areas, establishing a zero waste circular economy, transitioning to renewable energy, and addressing local environmental threats. In education, priorities were increasing funding, optimizing school policies, improving literacy, and ensuring comprehensive sex education. Public safety and legal system reforms focused on transforming the criminal legal system, reducing gun violence, and enhancing re-entry programs. Economic and community support priorities included increasing funding for youth programs, securing dedicated funding for affordable housing, enhancing renter rights, and investing in the creative economy.

The responses indicate a diverse range of policy priorities among the surveyed organizations, with a strong emphasis on environmental justice, education, social equity, criminal justice reform, and LGBTQ+ rights.

A detailed breakdown of all policy priorities and achieved systems reforms can be found in Appendix C of this report.

Additionally, in the future participants overwhelmingly want to explore increasing community engagement (79%) and building more partnerships (78%).

40%
OF SURVEYED ORGANIZATIONS HAVE SUCCESSFULLY ADVOCATED FOR POLICY CHANGES OR SYSTEMS REFORMS IN THE LAST 1-2 YEARS.

Advocacy Activities

The top three advocacy activities done by responding organizations were engaging elected officials on policy issues related to mission (83%), attending local government meetings (80%), and making a presentation to an elected official or appointed official (71%). While slightly more than half of participants said they engage political candidates on policy issues related to mission, only 14% distribute a political candidate questionnaire.

The latter segment of data is consistent with regulations on 501(c)(3) organizations to engage in electioneering. Several participating organizations therefore choose to also operate parallel 501(c)(4) organizations, recognizing the impact of elected candidates and the subsequent policies advocated for on behalf of the populations they serve.

ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING LANDSCAPE

Community Organizing Activities

We also asked organizations about the community organizing tactics they employ. Whether respondents took the community organizing portion of the survey or not, the vast majority (72%) engage in collaboration with other organizations as a strategy. This highlights an emphasis on partnership as a pathway to systemic change. Relationship and coalition building was the second most common tactic, identified by 71% of organizations, underscoring the importance of establishing strong networks as a foundation for effective advocacy. Conducting research, collecting data, and analysis to address community issues was third, noted by 51% of respondents, which supports community organizing efforts by providing evidence-based insights that guide strategic actions.

However, less prevalent were tactics like mobilizing people to take action and building power and capacity for a base, observed in only 30% of organizations. This could suggest that advocacy-focused organizations might predominantly engage in supporting roles, focusing on research and strategic planning to influence change from behind the scenes rather than through direct public mobilization.

Comfort with Direct Action as a Tactic

When asked whether direct action is important to influence or disrupt decision-makers from making harmful decisions on behalf of our community, 66% of participants answered yes. The majority of organizations (58%) also said their organization or membership was uncomfortable taking direct action, though 26% said they were comfortable with marching in the streets/blocking intersections of traffic and 25% were comfortable with protesting in a government building.

The majority of the respondents to the community organizing portion of the survey reflected that they were comfortable with taking direct action. Equally, 40% said their organization or membership was comfortable with protesting in a government building and striking outside of a workplace. Alternatively, 70% of those who chose not to fill out the community organization portion of the survey stated they were uncomfortable taking any direct action.

Notably, those organizations with a $5-$10 million+ dollar budget were the least comfortable with taking direct action. **This indicates that those organizations who only focus on advocacy and with larger annual budgets are much less likely to be comfortable with direct action, though the majority agree it is important to influence decision-making.**

Advocacy Networks, Successes, & Challenges

We asked organizations if they were involved in one of five prominent networks or coalitions in Memphis (Tennessee Nonprofit Network, Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action & Hope—MICAH, BLDG Memphis, Shelby County Voter Alliance, and Moral Budget Coalition). Twenty-four (42%) of respondents answered they were part of the Tennessee Nonprofit Network. The next highest number of organizations are involved with MICAH (25%). Fifteen organizations said they weren't involved in any of those listed.

Twelve organizations replied that they were involved in other networks/coalitions, including:
- CleanupTVA Coalition
- Ed Trust TN
- US Chamber
- Greater Memphis Chamber
- Fairness & Justice Coalition
- Momentum Memphis
- Office of ReEntry Justice Network

ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING LANDSCAPE

Advocacy Networks, Successes, & Challenges (cont.)

- Regional Cohort with the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
- Tennessee For All (statewide labor/community coalition)
- AFL-CIO and affiliates
- UCI (Urban Child Institute)

The data shows that the majority of organizations who are involved in the Moral Budget Coalition and the Shelby County Voter Alliance dedicate more of their staff, time, and resources to advocacy.

The Moral Budget Coalition comprises organizations focused primarily on advocacy, while the Shelby County Voter Alliance aims to increase community involvement in the political process through voting access and turnout. Many coalitions share overlapping partners.

While we've gained critical high-level insights from these coalitions and their partners, more information is needed to understand coalition-builders' resources and capacity and to build stronger, mutually beneficial partnerships.

Notably, the majority (55%) of organizations who are involved in these coalitions have achieved policy changes or systems reform in the last 1-2 years, suggesting an increased effectiveness when organizations partner together.

Defining & Tracking Success
Nearly half of the respondents (49%) define and track success for their advocacy efforts through key performance indicators (policy changes, systems reforms, increased awareness, etc.).

DATA COMPARISON: STAFF, TIME, & RESOURCES DEDICATED TO ADVOCACY VS. WHAT COALITIONS THEY'RE A PART OF

	ALL OR NEARLY ALL OF OUR STAFF TIME AND RESOURCES	MORE THAN HALF OF OUR STAFF TIME AND RESOURCES	LESS THAN HALF BUT STILL A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF OUR STAFF TIME AND RESOURCES	A SMALL AMOUNT OF OUR STAFF TIME AND RESOURCES	TOTAL
Q20: Shelby County Voter Alliance (SCVA) (A)	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	14.29% 1	14.29% 1	13.21% 7
Q20: Moral Budget Coalition (B)	14.29% 1	71.43% 5	14.29% 1	0.00% 0	13.21% 7
Q20: BLDG Memphis (E)	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	22.22% 2	16.98% 9
Q20: Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action & Hope (MICAH) (C)	21.43% 3	28.57% 4	28.57% 4	21.43% 3	26.42% 14
Q20: None of the above (F)	0.00% 0	33.33% 5	26.67% 4	40.00% 6	28.30% 15
Q20: Tennessee Nonprofit Network (D)	8.33% 2	12.50% 3	37.50% 9	41.67% 10	45.28% 24
Total Respondents	5	14	17	17	53

Other methods that rose to the top include listening sessions (42%) and community empowerment and capacity building (40%).

Reiterating responses to the survey, interviewees detailed how they know their work is successful. They emphasized that, when you couple the value of their programs with the lack of opportunities typically available for community members, it can be "completely transformational for an individual."

One organization talked about how their work is "not just [about] jobs, we are convicted." Another group discussed how they observe their success through a lens of individual, case, and systemic outcomes but they need more funding and support to do more of these measurements.

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Challenges Faced by Advocacy Organizations

The majority of participants (65%) stated that funding constraints were the main challenge their organizations face in advocacy work. Behind this, lack of staff/volunteers (51%) and political and regulatory barriers (44%) were significant obstacles. Other barriers not specifically included as answer choices were "state legislative barriers regarding environmental issues," "capacity," "preemption," and "infrastructure to support broader network building, organizing, and activation."

One organization shared in their interview that their work is complex—that when there's generational poverty, we need generational solutions and that "change happens at the speed of trust." To address solutions the way they believe they should, they said **"resources and time"** would be helpful, especially considering that they have to have the capacity to try things out and "start back over again" when something happens in the community they feel takes them back to square one in their efforts.

Multiple organizations shared that time, trust, and the resources needed to scale were supports necessary to be more successful. One organization shared they **"need a minimum of three-year funding for systems change work."**

Organizational Adaptability & Training Needs

Organizations across various sectors have adapted in response to evolving community needs and political climates through a range of strategic shifts. From actively engaging with communities through listening sessions to forming statewide coalitions for broader impact, the responding organizations have shown themselves to be responsive and willing to redirect efforts to be more effective.

Many organizations have begun to recognize the importance of policy advocacy and have adjusted their work to prioritize systems change. One organization mentioned making the shift to state legislative advocacy due to the kinds of bills being proposed in the Tennessee legislature recently that would harm the people they serve. A few organizations also mentioned having to take on new programs to respond to new or growing needs for vaccine access and shelter because of the pandemic, and that "funding dropped considerably during and after the pandemic" so one organization has doubled down on grant writing while working with less staffing.

Other Feedback & Suggestions Regarding Advocacy

We asked organizations an open-ended question to gather other feedback and suggestions regarding advocacy. Here are some of their answers:

- "Fighting pre-emption and identifying creative legal and policy solutions to that end"
- "Allow advocacy orgs to develop tactics and strategies without feeling that funding is at risk"
- "Our situation is similar to many nonprofit orgs in Memphis, in which our existence depends on government support and cooperation. Therefore, advocacy is necessarily more nuanced than it would be for organizations who do not have government contracts"
- "LGBTQIA+ advocates need to consider anti-poverty work as a pillar and anti-poverty advocates need to consider LGBTQIA+ people as a constituency"
- "Memphis has a significant need for qualified community organizers. Bringing quality training to Memphis is critical to build the organizing base"

"CHANGE HAPPENS AT THE SPEED OF TRUST"

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A MAJORITY OF ORGS WHETHER DOING ADVOCACY OR COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, ARE LARGELY *ON THE SAME PAGE* AS FAR AS WHO THEY SERVE & THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY.

Background

A total of 21 organizations chose to participate in the community organizing portion of the survey. Below we've outlined insights specific to groups who specifically do community organizing work in addition to advocacy.

Types of Community Organizing Groups

As reflected in the advocacy portion of the survey, all community organizing groups self-identified as 501(c)(3) organizations. The majority of respondents who said they were also 501(c)(4) organizations were part of this segment, making up 19% of community organizing groups. Six organizations (31%) were evenly split between serving as a neighborhood or local group or a faith-based organization. Two organizations claimed they also have a PAC (political action committee) and one stated they were a community-led efforts intermediary. One organization described the framework for organizing and advocacy efforts to **"build people because you cannot build Memphis if we're not building Memphians."**

Where Community Organizing is Taking Place

The majority of community organizing groups serve all areas of Memphis, with the next three highest areas specified being South Memphis (24%), Midtown (14%), and North Memphis (14%).

Ten (48%) of the related organizations work in Raleigh, Frayser, Nutbush, and Klondike- Smokey City, which are neighborhoods in northern Memphis. There are 10 (48%) organizations that work in neighborhoods in southern Memphis: Whitehaven, Hickory Hill, Westwood, Soulsville, Parkway Village, and Depot. Seven respondents (33%) organize in Midtown.

This indicates more of an equal breakdown of focus on northern and southern Memphis. It also indicates that— compared to advocacy groups that don't do community organizing—these community organizing groups have more focus on Midtown. Midtown is a central location in Memphis that is politically more progressive than many other Memphis neighborhoods; it is racially diverse but a majority white neighborhood (48%).

The trends also show less groups organizing in the University, Sea Isle, and Cordova neighborhoods, which are more affluent. **There is also less focus on South City by organizers compared to advocacy-centered organizations who responded to the survey, despite this area having a 63% poverty rate.**

Priority Populations Served by Community Organizing Entities

The breakdown of priority populations served is nearly identical to that of organizations focused on advocacy. The top three populations reflect a focus on Black or African Americans (57%), low-income families (57%), and children and youth (43%).

There is more focus on men and boys (38% compared to 26% for advocacy groups) as well as incarcerated or formerly incarcerated populations (29% compared to 19%).

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
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Operating Budgets and Longevity

Most of the community organizing respondents have been operational for less than a decade, with 43% operating for fewer than 5 years and an additional 29% having operated between 6 to 10 years. Three organizations have been around for 11-15 years and only three have been in operation for more than 15 years.

Compared to organizations focused only on advocacy, community organizing groups are much more likely to have budgets less than $1 million a year (67%). Only 14% of these groups fell between $1-1.9 million and 10% between $2-$4.9 million a year. Only two organizations said they have a budget between $5-$10 million+ a year.

The prevalence of newer organizations among community organizing respondents, as opposed to advocacy-focused groups, supports our assertion earlier in the report that organizational longevity correlates with increased annual budgets.

Despite this being the traditional funding approach, we believe it's crucial to pursue investments in newer community organizing groups to facilitate their long-term sustainability. The length of years in operation does not necessarily indicate effectiveness.

When organizations are able to receive significant, multi-year support on the front end, they're more able to implement the strategies and tactics necessary to achieve large-scale systems change.

"A SLOW BUILD OF INFRASTRUCTURE IS IMPORTANT"

One organization expressed that, while there is significant potential for community organizing, activating and engaging people remains a major challenge and that a "slow build of that infrastructure is important."

Another organization mentioned the difficulty of measuring progress in system change initiatives over a short timeframe, emphasizing the need for consistent funding to build their infrastructure and capacity, stating, "On system change stuff, I can say that the measurements of those . . . at this point, three years in, seem virtually impossible . . . because you're not going to be passing policy changes every year."

A Case Study: The Closure of the Mid-South Peace & Justice Center

An anecdotal example highlighting the necessity of funding support is the recent closure of the Mid-South Peace & Justice Center in Memphis, **a longstanding community organizing entity that operated for over 35 years, and unfortunately ceased operations due to a funding shortage.**

MSPJC effectively organized on a variety of issue areas over the years. In the final years before their closing, they mobilized around criminal and juvenile justice reform, housing, police accountability, and public transit funding and access. What made them unique was that nearly all of their work was led by people directly impacted by the issues. Additionally, they were one of the only organizations in the region that had a training department dedicated specifically to skilling up leaders, organizers, and advocates.

The Mid-South Peace & Justice Center was foundational to many of the successes that have come to fruition in recent years as they began laying the groundwork for environmental justice, public transit funding, and police accountability in the last few decades.

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Mid-South Peace & Justice Center Cast Study (cont.)
Losing an organization like this has left a serious gap for training and resourcing organizers, as well as serving as a fiscal sponsor for more grassroots, non-501(c)(3) community organizing groups.

ABOVE ALL, THE LOSS OF THIS ORGANIZATION HAS RESULTED IN A SIGNIFICANT VOID OF OVER 35 YEARS' WORTH OF INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE.

The closure of the Mid-South Peace & Justice Center serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges faced by community organizing groups, particularly in the face of severe backlash from opponents and elected officials (which we will touch on later in the report). Their experience highlights the critical need for sustained support and investment in such organizations to ensure their longevity and the preservation of irreplaceable institutional knowledge. **As we delve deeper into these dynamics, the lessons drawn from the MSPJC's closure and legacy underscore the urgency of bolstering resources for the long-term sustainability of community organizing in Memphis.**

Time & Resources Dedicated to Advocacy
More than half of community organizing groups spend most or all of their time and resources dedicated to advocacy (57%), and only 20% spend a small portion of time and resources. This is substantially more than those organizations who did not self-identify as community organizing groups. This aligns with the data trends showing that non-community organizing groups primarily focus on social services, community outreach, and educational services and that the majority of these respondents' engagement with advocacy is moderate or limited.

Tactics, Strategies, & Base
The vast majority of community organizing groups identified gathering people to identify issues (76%) and relationship and coalition building (76%) as their primary tactics. After these, they answered that they gather people most impacted by decision-making to identify specific challenges and barriers (72%) and collaborate with orgs/individuals to change community conditions, policies, and/or programs (72%). More than half of all organizations responded that they use all of the tactics listed, indicating that these groups tackle systems change with a holistic strategy and a variety of tactics.

Of those who responded with policy successes in the last 1-2 years, **community organizing entities made up the majority of these organizations (56%), reiterating their focus on policy advocacy and highlighting the effectiveness of community organizing to effect systems change.**

Additionally, the majority (64%) of community organizing groups who are comfortable with taking direct action have also been effective in achieving policy change or systems reform, **indicating that direct action can be a successful tactic for systemic change.**

56%
OF ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED THAT HAD SUCCESSFULLY ACHIEVED POLICY CHANGE WERE COMMUNITY ORGANIZING GROUPS.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
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Primary Organizing Focus

The majority of community organizing groups (58%) focus on issue-based organizing. Only 21% hone in on neighborhood/place-based organizing, which aligns with the insights that most organizations don't necessarily limit their efforts to specific neighborhoods and instead serve all areas of Memphis. Two organizations (11%) identified that they do affinity/identity-based organizing and another two selected "Other," listing "faith-rooted community organizing" and "affinity + issue based."

Who is their organizing base?

Fourteen out of the 21 groups (67%) who responded to a question about whether or not they use a membership-based model replied that they do not. When asked about who their organizing base is, 71% of organizations said other community organizers or leaders.

Anecdotally, grassroots organizing groups have observed that many actions and events attract the same, relatively few people--most of whom are part of other organizing groups.

This pattern likely speaks to our data trends that community organizing entities are less resourced, thereby making it more difficult to build, maintain, and continue to grow a consistent broad, external base.

However, the next top two bases identified by these organizing groups were residents (62%) and members of their organizations (57%). Despite the majority of respondents to the community organizing portion of the survey saying they don't use membership-based models, they heavily indicated members as their base.

This may suggest that while organizing entities don't have formal membership models, they might operate with a core group of engaged individuals who are considered members in a less formal sense.

The majority of respondents (67%) *do* have staff dedicated to building a base of people directly impacted by the issues. **The ability to have staff to reach directly impacted people suggests a strong commitment to this approach. This tactic is also effective, as these organizations make up 41% of those who have affected policy change.**

Insights on Community Organizers

Most respondents have 0-2 community organizers on staff, with 38% having 1-2 and 33% having zero. Four of the organizations have 3-5 community organizers, and only two organizations had 6-10+.

We inquired about barriers that organizers on staff face, and 71% answered resource and financial constraints. Following this, 41% of organizers struggle with burnout and well-being.

This data is consistent with a study published in 2018 that revealed about **50% of activists, particularly racial justice activists, experience burnout.**

In our interviews, organizations expressed the difficulty of retaining staff, both due to funding constraints and the difficulty of experiencing what one group called "secondary trauma." They're making do with what they have, offering more paid days off, creating committees to improve internal culture and well-being, and creating a more flexible structure to allow staff to work virtually some days of the week.

As stated by one of the interviewed organizations: **"A lot of barriers can be addressed by funding."**

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Insights on Community Organizers (cont.)

Another organization interviewed stated that they were looking to hire a senior lead organizer to help build out their programming, yet they had a challenge identifying well-trained and experienced organizers in the Memphis market. **This particular organization echoes what we heard from others: that there is a need to develop and train more organizers in Memphis.**

This staffing limitation is mirrored in the volunteer segment as well, as most of these organizations don't have more than 5 volunteer community organizers. Thirty-eight percent have 3-5 volunteer organizers, 29% don't have any volunteer organizers at all, and 19% have 1-2 volunteers. Only a handful have more than 10 volunteers.

If most organizations have a small number of volunteers, this likely means that there is heavy reliance on their staff organizers—if they have any staff at all.

Our data trends show that organizations with budgets over $2 million rely less on volunteers, possibly due to their ability to hire more paid staff or external services. Responses from mid-range budget organizations don't show a clear pattern. Some of these organizations have been able to hire staff, while others still rely on volunteers to push advocacy and organizing efforts forward.

This corresponds with the data, which shows that half of organizations who have an annual budget under $2 million don't have community organizers on staff. Forty-three percent only have 1-2 paid community organizers.

Experienced Backlash & Impact on Annual Budgets

We asked community organizing groups to what extent they receive backlash or opposition or encounter barriers from these groups: elected/government officials, community members, media outlets, corporations, non-governmental organizations, other advocacy groups, allies/supporters, and/or opponents.

Not surprisingly, the most pronounced backlash, opposition, or obstacles were encountered from opponents, as indicated by 50% of respondents reporting significant to severe levels of difficulty. Notably, elected officials emerged as the second most significant source of resistance towards community organizers, with 41% reporting significant to severe backlash. The least-reported resistance came from allies/supporters, with 91% of groups indicating no or minimal backlash, along with 77% reporting no or minimal backlash from other advocacy groups.

Notably, groups that fell in the range of $5-$10 million were less likely to experience barriers, opposition, or backlash on the whole. When encountered with resistance from elected officials, 41% of the groups with an annual budget under $5 million reported significant to severe backlash, opposition, or barriers. **This may indicate that backlash from elected officials has an impact on an organization's annual budget.**

41%
OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING GROUPS FACED *SIGNIFICANT TO SEVERE* BACKLASH FROM ELECTED OFFICIALS

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
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Experienced Backlash & Impact on Annual Budgets (cont.)

When we compare this assessment with our data on organizations' comfort with direct action versus their budgets, it suggests that, in order to protect their funding, more well-funded organizations may be less inclined to pressure elected officials.

If backlash from certain tactics jeopardizes funding, this presents a power imbalance that must be recognized and addressed by funders to ensure the success of advocacy and organizing movements moving forward.

In addition to experiencing backlash from elected officials, half of community organizing groups under a $5 million budget report significant to severe backlash from other opponents. **Considering the difficulties outlined above for community organizing groups, especially those with lower annual budgets, the opposition faced by these organizations emphasizes the importance of additional external support, particularly through funding.**

Vision Beyond Barriers

When prompted about community organizing groups' vision if there were no barriers, organizations highlighted several key priorities across various social and organizational issues. For political and advocacy efforts, they aim to identify and prepare reproductive-justice-based candidates for office, and achieve policy wins at state and federal levels. Environmental advocacy goals include transitioning TVA's energy focus from fossil fuels to renewable energy, managing coal ash safely, and enhancing public participation and transparency in governance.

Economic and social equity priorities involve addressing homelessness, establishing a food bank, increasing salaries and wages, ensuring equity in education, providing quality healthcare, improving access to affordable childcare and housing, and equipping individuals with trade skills to enhance employment opportunities. To build organizational capacity, they emphasize hiring essential staff with adequate budgets, building a strong base, and increasing impacted leaders.

Training & Skills Development Needed

The top two training and skills development areas community organizing groups said would enhance their efforts are power mapping (67%) and fundraising (67%). Following closely behind are policy analysis and advocacy techniques (62%) and community engagement and mobilization skills (62%). The data points reflect what we learned in the interviews, which is that **many community organizing groups are shifting more into policy advocacy and need expertise and resources to do this effectively.**

One of the interviewed organizations mentioned that Tennessee Nonprofit Network has been helpful to skill them up on advocacy but that it's tough to find additional training "because everybody comes at it from a different space, different knowledge base, different needs, different opportunities."

One group shared that they've received helpful training from ASPEN Institute, the Wharton School, and Kresge Foundation, and they decide what training they will focus on based on the staffs' input. They also shared that, though they are doing community engagement now, they'd like to scale up their work and involve more directly impacted people in advocacy efforts.

"A LOT OF THINGS IN MEMPHIS NEED TO SCALE"

"THEY'RE THE EXPERT ON THEIR LIVES"

Strategies & Tactics

The interviewed organizations identified a variety of tactics they engage in. Across the board, many of the organizations emphasized their partnerships being crucial to their efforts, including relationships with elected officials and other advocacy and community organizing groups in Memphis. When referring to their work to secure funding for public transit, they said, **"When you let people lead on the solutions that impact them, they will use [public transit]."** Another organization stated it's **"harder to figure out how to translate identifying issues into campaigns."** A separate group echoed this sentiment, specifically related to policy advocacy, saying, "So, **we're kind of writing that playbook** and we have to figure things out along the way and sort of pave the cow path. Along that, we have primarily focused on our kind of program and processes and trying to figure out how we do what we do. Because there's not any, there wasn't any, any of that."

Various organizations mentioned their partnership with other groups, including Black Clergy Collaborative, Decarcerate Memphis, Memphis for All, MICAH, and Shelby County Voter Alliance, to advance policy change and communicate with their representatives. Only one organization mentioned that they were involved in political/electoral engagement. Others shared that their focus is more on engaging in a "Day on the Hill' and presenting solutions to those who have already been elected to serve.

Decision Making & Governance

Most of the interviewed organizations shared that their decisions are made based on the feedback they receive from the populations they serve. One organization said, **"The board is not a rubber stamp board. We build together. We are driven by what our clients share with us. We are driven by what they tell me their problems are."** Some organizations reserve seats on their board specifically for members of their community.

"IF YOU'RE TRULY GOING TO BE PLACE-BASED, THE COMMUNITY GOVERNS THE AGENDA."

Another organization stated that **"the service is geared towards their needs . . . it's very iterative."** They also indicated that—although the buck stopped with them as far as decision-making, because they are the only staff person—they rely on the input from those directly impacted by the issues because those individuals describe issues that "are very different than what you see in all of the reports coming out of the different divisions of government."

They clarified, "I don't think anyone's ill-intended there, but I also think it's not enough to continue to do that decade after decade," indicating that they focus on solutions that are innovative and responsive to the needs of those they serve.

One organization we interviewed was a local chapter of a national organization. They mentioned that local chapters are fairly free to choose their campaigns, though it is filtered through a racial equity screening to ensure alignment with the goals of the national organization.

Observations Regarding Organizers on Staff

One insight we gained from our interviews is that **grassroots organizations appear to be uniquely positioned for success because of the organizers they're able to bring on staff to build trust over time with communities.** Because of this, they're more able to invest in long-term relationships with communities to develop greater context and clarity to understand issues impacting communities they serve. For example, one organization has a staff organizer with over 30 years of experience.

Another organization mentioned it's important for their organizers to recognize the "voice and choice" of families. They talked about the importance of listening to what people in neighborhoods are saying about their needs and what the barriers are.

A separate organization echoed the above sentiments, saying the people they serve know what they need and— if you get them the platform, the tools, and ability to strategize—"they can do things for themselves."

They stated the issue is that **"organizers are at the bottom of the hierarchy."** The organizer also said, "Many of my friends that are organizers are **moving to other organizations** about every 8 months as organizers **seeking higher pay."** The organizer interviewed said that a benefit of their job included development from Training for Change and Midwest Academy and that they desired to have access to more training from these organizations.

"WE'RE TALKING ABOUT GENERATIONAL POVERTY- WE NEED GENERATIONAL SOLUTIONS. CHANGE HAPPENS AT THE SPEED OF TRUST"

Insights on Barriers, Professional Development, & Well-Being for Organizers

One organizer interviewed mentioned that the difficulty in retention in their organization is that organizers are paid significantly less than upper-level staff and that the only way they could move up in salary was to go into nonprofit management, which wasn't appealing to them.

"IT IS HARD TO STAY A FULL-TIME ORGANIZER FOR YOUR WHOLE LIFE.

THERE IS A REASON THAT MOST ORGANIZATIONS HIRE ORGANIZERS WITHOUT EXPERIENCE AND PEOPLE LEAVE EVERY TWO YEARS."

Representative Demographics

One organization shared that the population that they largely serve is African American women. The frontline staff is largely African American women, which reflects the population that they serve. They shared that it is critical that their frontline staff, specifically site coordinators, be able to engage well in the neighborhoods, hear the voice of the families, and understand that they represent the voice of those communities. A staff member said, **"Our job is to help knock down barriers, create relationships and partnerships."** Their executive director stated that they "want to be informed by what the people in the community are saying and give me the words and the language."

Another organization shared that they **trust and follow Black leadership in Memphis** and that their executive leadership reflects this value, as it is composed mostly of Black people and people of color. Their work is primarily focused on anti-racism and "building a democracy where everyone is free to thrive." As far as their hiring, they mentioned that part of their hiring process includes racial equity competencies and implicit bias training.

Barriers & Successes

One organization told us that a major success has been the several years of deep support they received from their founding board to give them time to prove the concept. They stated, "It was a true gift." They mentioned that there has been some success with local foundations and that they wrapped up a capital campaign last year with foundation and corporate support.

Our team conducted an interview with an organization that was very honest about their perception of the funding landscape in Memphis, stating how difficult it can be for a newer organization to break into the scene. They shared how they believed that the same organizations were being given funding year after year, particularly by local governments. Despite the difficulties they shared, they felt like they were finally being taken seriously in their particular issue realm.

INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

AAnother organization mentioned that funding has declined due to heavy reliance on large foundations and that they would be better off if their funding strategy was coupled with a grassroots campaign for donations. They also shared that they had lost funding and connections with others in their faith community due to their stance on policing. Their successes included working directly with families and local organizations to support a person on death row as well as a mother whose son had been a victim of police brutality.

Several organizations shared that both funding and the work itself have become more difficult to navigate following the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I THINK POWER HOARDING IS HAPPENING. AND WE KEEP GIVING THE SAME MONEY AND THE SAME JOBS AND THE SAME BREAKS."

"IT'D BE NICE TO HAVE MORE PEOPLE TO SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES WITH. IT'S DIFFICULT BECAUSE OUR CORE LEADERSHIP AND OUR BASE IS SMALL".

INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

Outlook For Memphis

Despite challenges, a prevailing sense of hope underpins the work of these organizations.

The interviewed organizations spoke of gaining hope from the commitment and passion of their teams, from young people, and from new city leadership.

Many of them shared that the work they do to move the needle for families and for those they serve helps them to feel positive about the future of Memphis.

One organization spoke about the political climate giving them despair, claiming, "We are staring down fascism." This despair was echoed by other organizations interviewed.

Another interviewed organization shared that they felt despair, on some level, because of the "romanticization" of the people they serve and a "charity mindset" that could potentially set the organization up to fail.

They also expressed frustration with the cyclical funding of a select group of organizations, emphasizing the need for these organizations to examine their models, structures, and role in community power dynamics, saying "I don't know how to break into that cycle."

Another organization when asked if they felt more hopeful or more despairing, they replied **"Yes."** Speaking about a lot of tragedies they've seen over the years, they still felt hope their work could "bridge the gap."

"WE DIDN'T GET HERE OVERNIGHT, WE'RE NOT GOING TO POLICE, EDUCATE, OR LOCK PEOPLE UP OUT OF THIS OVERNIGHT."

NATIONAL FUNDING TRENDS FOR ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING

The sections below highlight existing research we believe supports the recommendations we will offer in this report, as well as practical strategies and practices.

Common practices within the nonprofit sector replicate oppressive systems that negatively impact marginalized people and block power-shifting and shared decision-making. These practices include operations, staff compensation, and competition with other nonprofit organizations, along with scarcity, competition, and rewarding of short-term productivity reinforced by philanthropy.

According to Borealis Philanthropy, "Well-resourced [community-driven organizing and advocacy on social justice issues] will allow grassroots movements to grow their impact and more effectively carry out strategies on the ground to close the gaps for those facing disparities".

Importance of Advocacy & Community Organizing to Collective Impact
The report *Rebalancing Power: Examining the Role of Advocacy and Organizing in Collective Impact*, presented by Frontlines and The Collective Impact Forum, underscores the critical role that community organizing and advocacy play in achieving equitable and sustainable systems change.

Through comprehensive research including interviews, case studies, and literature review, several key themes emerged, guiding how collective impact initiatives can better integrate these strategies. It emphasizes that the need for a community organizing and advocacy strategy is essential for achieving equitable systems and policy outcomes. Despite their importance, there is a tendency to favor "insider" approaches over "outsider" tactics, which can limit the effectiveness of collective impact efforts.

TThe report argues that: "**"Any collective impact effort that is unwilling to challenge these power structures is incapable of real equitable systems change." Embracing both "insider" (collaborative) and "outsider" (disruptive) approaches is crucial for balanced and effective change.**

The report highlights legal concerns that often lead to cautious funding decisions by funders supporting direct advocacy and organizing efforts, particularly regarding activities perceived as partisan. **However, advocacy includes a wide range of actions beyond lobbying, and it is crucial for collective impact work to challenge inequitable systems.**

Creating conditions for effective advocacy involves strengthening civic infrastructure by prioritizing advocacy efforts, strategically engaging with public officials while maintaining the autonomy of advocacy and organizing initiatives, and balancing the cultivation of allies with independent advocacy actions.

Community organizing requires independence from traditional power structures, and efforts that incorporate these strategies are better positioned to create systemic change. To effectively incorporate these principles, the report recommends that backbone organizations democratize the design process of collective impact initiatives, recognize and address advocacy limitations, seek resources and training for organizing skills, and consider employing professional facilitators to manage power imbalances.

Funders and backbone organizations should ask critical questions to ensure equitable decision-making and representation, such as identifying involved advocates, understanding power dynamics, and assessing the presence and influence of grassroots organizers

NATIONAL FUNDING TRENDS FOR ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING

Importance of Advocacy & Community Organizing to Collective Impact (cont.)

Building relationships and trust is also essential which means fostering transparency and collective decision-making, actively building trust with grassroots and community-based organizations, and developing metrics to evaluate the success of relationship-building efforts are critical components.

Funders play a pivotal role in shaping the success of collective impact initiatives. **By supporting community organizing and advocacy efforts, funders can enhance the reach and effectiveness of collective impact strategies, ensure that community voices are at the forefront of decision-making processes, and address systemic inequities through sustained, community-led efforts.** This report serves as a vital resource for funders and backbone organizations, offering actionable insights and practical steps to prioritize community organizing and advocacy in collective impact efforts.

Capacity Building Support

In the article *Transformational Capacity Building* in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, capacity building is defined as "the process of building and strengthening the systems, structures, cultures, skills, resources, and power that organizations need to serve their communities." **Many grassroots organizations serving communities of color are barely surviving.** Often, this is seen as a leadership failure or blamed on inabilities of the organization. Organizations are viewed as not being ready to access funding and support. Barriers include the cost of hiring consultants, lack of staffing and funding, and eligibility issues for non-501(c)(3) organizations. Despite strengths like trust, lived experiences, and intimate community knowledge, these organizations are often not positioned to take advantage of capacity building efforts.

In the article *Transformational Capacity Building*, authors note that conventional capacity building often pressures nonprofits led by people of color to conform to standards of success based on white professionalism, potentially hindering innovation. By failing to widen its cultural lens, conventional capacity building misses an opportunity to profoundly rethink how organizations can operate and achieve their goals.

The strategy proposed in *Transformational Capacity Building* considers capacity building processes that 1) foster trusting, transparent partnerships among capacity builders, nonprofit leaders, and their staff and 2) strive to cultivate creativity of their members and facilitate collective action to understand and address root causes of issues impacting their communities.

Transformational Capacity Building Approaches

The seven approaches for transformational capacity building outlined in *Transformational Capacity Building*:

- **"Build trustworthy and culturally resonant relationships."** Transformational capacity builders must develop a strong sense of the history, patterns of behavior, and culture of the organizations they work with.

- **"Address underlying patterns of behavior rooted in history and culture."** The approach strives to grasp and tackle the foundational patterns and beliefs influencing behavior and adapt tools that address the needs of organizations. The objective is to embrace new methods but also to facilitate discussions about the underlying drivers of current organizational processes. In doing so, the aim is to reflect on default operational methods that might be embedded in traumas and constraints.

NATIONAL FUNDING TRENDS FOR ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING

Transformational Capacity Building Approaches (cont.)
In doing so, the aim is to reflect on default operational methods that might be embedded in traumas and constraints.

- **"Encourage nonprofits to be specialists, not generalists."** Capacity building services that prioritize appropriate scaling and permit specialization are helping nonprofits led by people of color, especially grassroots and community-based organizations, to access the benefits often associated with larger nonprofits. The strategy removes the pressure and expectation for organizations to scale up, which the authors say perpetuates white professionalism.

- **"Cultivate networks to generate power and change systems."** The approach focuses on the larger ecosystem versus individual organizations. Investment in the ecosystem fosters an environment for learning, connecting, and cultivating together to develop robust and strong responses to community needs. The approach emphasizes movement building, providing a vehicle for information sharing, generating new ideas, cultivating projects, and building power.

- **"Invest in the inner well-being and growth of leaders."** The strategy acknowledges that organizations, movements, and communities thrive when the leaders are healthy, prioritizing their emotional, mental, and physical health. "Spaces for growth and introspective aim to build trusting relationships with space for candor, pushback, vulnerability, and authentic support that increases participants' ability for self-reflection and leadership."

- **"Provide simultaneous, multilayered capacity-building opportunities."** This prioritizes helping organizations build capacity in multiple areas over time rather than one-off workshops.

- **"Offer direct, flexible funding for transformative capacity building."** A nonprofit budget is often like putting together a puzzle because of the restricted use of some funds for specific purposes. Multi-year, general operating grants provide an opportunity for grassroots organizations serving communities of color to use those dollars most effectively.

In this article, authors leave us with this thought, **"Together, nonprofits of color, their leaders, capacity builders, and funders can create a path forward—one that supports communities of color to address the systemic vulnerabilities they are facing and create the profound shifts necessary for more equitable outcomes."**

Capacity Building in Practice

The Greenlining Institute
A significant amount of concentration is given to avoiding pitfalls of conventional capacity building efforts. The Institute pays significant attention to the representation on their team and shifting power. Staff acknowledge the importance of understanding the systemic issues that led to the need for capacity building in the first place.

The Greenlining Institute is constructing a team that focuses capacity building investment in low-income communities to tackle structural changes to reverse disinvestment and racist policies culminating over time.

NATIONAL FUNDING TRENDS FOR ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING

Capacity Building in Practice (cont.)
With the belief that communities understand the issues impacting them and are positioned to develop the best solutions, Greenlining Institute felt it critical to provide additional resources, relationships, and expertise to make those solutions a reality. The Institute is assisting communities across California to impact statewide policies and practices.

The Institute defines capacity building as the following: "Capacity building is the process of strengthening local leadership, skills, expertise and resources so that communities can meet their needs and achieve self-determination.

Against a backdrop of systemic disinvestment and oppression, we must invest in the capacity of local leaders to advance community visions. In an article Capacity Building: Learning from the Communities that Raised Us authored by The Greenlining Institute, the Institute highlights that their work includes uplifting community knowledge, building skills, developing partnerships, identifying and planning for projects, and shifting resources and power".

According to the article *Capacity Building: Learning from the Communities that Raised Us*, The Greenlining Institute helped shape the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC). This initiative develops the capacity of under-resourced communities to secure funding for climate change efforts, strengthen partnerships, engage residents, implement projects, and secure investments.

The Racial Equity to Accelerate Change (REACH) Fund
The fund is constructed to invest in racial equity practitioners with different specializations that work to disrupt white supremacy and build momentum towards liberatory practices that reimagine and reconstruct systems.

Race equity practitioners using a racial equity lens have the capability to build new tools and practices to work alongside nonprofit leaders and organizations towards disassembling institutional racism, erecting race-conscious organizations, and shaping strategy, policy, and cultural change while navigating changing political and corporate environments. As mentioned in the article, *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, practitioners have the flexibility to test and experiment with innovative ways to organize.

Race equity practitioners use a variety of liberatory practices to do the work. In the report *Meeting the Moment, Keeping the Momentum*, there are six approaches that are highlighted that are critical to create greater alignment in people's work, that also nurture a culture that centers equity, as well as nurture the larger movement ecosystem. The approaches include: 1) internal work; 2) decolonizing the nonprofit sector; 3) political education; 4) holistic healing, repair, and rehumanizing; 5) inclusive governance; 6) field building and networked ecosystems.

Funding for Communities of Color Building Power
In the article *Transformational Capacity Building* in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, the authors acknowledge the critical role of grassroots organizations, "Grassroots organizations rooted in communities of color are actively developing and applying solutions to issues that impact their communities. Whether addressing issues like incarceration, gentrification, racial profiling, or the climate crisis, these organizations, led by and for people of color, consistently respond to systemic inequities with sophistication and effectiveness, drawing from their lived experiences and extensive relationships embedded in communities".

NATIONAL FUNDING TRENDS FOR ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING

Funding for Communities of Color Building Power (cont.)
An example of an entity utilizing a similar approach to transformational capacity building is The North Star Fund, which supports grassroots organizations led by communities of color in New York City and the Hudson Valley. As of 2023, it had awarded over $117 million to over 2,800 organizations. Grantees are leading efforts to address interconnected and intersectional issues utilizing broad-based strategies and orchestrating campaigns in partnership with other groups and throughout the state.

While organizations are advocating for community investment and community ownership, they are employing a mixture of community building, mutual aid, and healing justice strategies and tactics. The fund nurtures deeper connections with grantees, strengthens the organizing ecosystem, and cultivates a learning community, resulting in a multiplier effect by convening grassroots organizations with varied perspectives across geographic areas.

State of Funding After COVID-19 and Widespread Racial Justice Protests
Following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, there was increased urgency to shift power and investment to grassroots Black-led and People of Color-led efforts. According to the report *Two Years After History Uprisings, Where Does Philanthropy's Commitment to Racial Justice Stand in 2020*, billions of dollars were committed towards racial equity and justice, but there is no clear data on how much of that funding reached grassroots Black-led organizations.

Although Black-led organizations are uniquely positioned to serve Black communities because of shared language, knowledge of issues, and close bonds within those communities, Black-led organizations operate on revenues that are 24% less than white-led organizations.

Despite movement in the right direction, commitments to racial justice made by philanthropy and the corporate sector in the summer of 2020 have not been fully honored. Reports and data highlight the disparities between the promised support and the actual resources allocated to movements. Unfortunately, the funding that movements receive in response to their demands and calls to action, particularly those led by Black leaders, often falls short.

In a recent report by the Racial Equity to Accelerate Change Fund at Borealis Philanthropy and Research Action Design, political developments led to greater awareness and discourse about racial equity; however, the momentum seems to be slowing down.

"Without deep alignment and collective organizing and advocacy among the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors, we will continue to risk fatigue, complacency and further backlash". In order to maintain momentum, changes in the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors are required.

In the article *Two Years After 2020's Global Movement for Racial Justice, Where Are We Now*? by the Alliance for Philanthropy and Social Investment Worldwide, authors highlight leaders and organizations making bold strides. Black women have played a pivotal role, such as Crystal Hayling of the Libra Foundation, who leads the Democracy Frontlines Fund.

The Libra Foundation supports movements like Healthy and Free Tennessee, a Black woman-led reproductive justice organization. Additionally, the Black Feminist Fund, established in early 2021 after a decade-long effort, channels resources toward Black feminist movements globally.

NATIONAL FUNDING TRENDS FOR ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING

Trust-Based Philanthropy

In an essay "Where Is the Heartbeat" by Jara Dean Coffey for The Bridgespan Group, Dean-Coffey shares that "Trust is about human connection. It is about valuing you and you me. We must become more comfortable with the unpredictability of human dynamics".

In an essay "The Trust-based Philanthropy Conundrum: Toward Donor-Doer Relationships That Drive Impact" by The Bridgespan Group, authors state that "trust is the connective tissue of human relationships. In its absence, there's no community, no economy, no collaboration, no collective flourishing. Organizations, too, are bound together by trust, both formal and informal."

Trust-based philanthropy is a methodology that directs the relationship-building process between funders and grantees, emphasizing a core set of values aimed at promoting equity, shifting power dynamics, and fostering mutual accountability. This approach highlights a funder's potential to align organizational culture, structure, leadership, and practices to achieve these goals.

Establishing trust between a funder and an organization presents challenges, largely due to the power dynamics favoring the funder. **Funders typically have numerous options for allocating funding, whereas organizations often have limited leeway in rejecting potential funders**. In cultivating trust, an environment conducive to open exchange of ideas and feedback must emerge, potentially challenging biases, beliefs, and practices. Therefore, facilitating an active feedback loop through appropriate tools becomes pivotal in fostering trust.

Trust-based philanthropy, including providing multi-year unrestricted funding, accelerates and sustains advocacy and organizing efforts by offering flexibility to allocate resources where most needed and foster innovation.

Another practice involves shifting the onus onto the funder to actively learn about the grantee, rather than requiring grantees to navigate complex application processes and maintain the relationship. Additionally, streamlining reporting requirements is crucial. Furthermore, funders can greatly assist grantees by opening doors and granting access to networks that often elude most grassroots organizations.

Embracing trust-based philanthropy requires building and maintaining a culture embedded in trust among staff, leadership, grantees, trustees, and community members. Funders taking this approach recognize power imbalances and practice conversations about power, race, and intersectionality. The culture is also built around reflection and dialogue.

The approach also requires the structure of an organization be in alignment with their practices. For example, reports could be delivered in a verbal conversational format instead of being highly reliant on the written word. Leadership and staff reflect the communities that funders serve and the work being done. The leadership models a collaborative and facilitative approach to leadership.

Funders must be attuned to the ways in which they have access to power and privilege and the ways their behavior unintentionally perpetuates inequitable power dynamics and White supremacy. Additionally, the organization acknowledges the ways in which oppressive systems show up in the culture and takes action to address the replications of those systems.

Trust improves relationships, leading to better outcomes like efficiency, change management, communication, team performance, staff retention, productivity, and engagement. It also allows for reimagining how success is framed and measured.

NATIONAL FUNDING TRENDS FOR ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING

Bolstering Narrative Organizing (cont.)

In an essay by Rachel Weidinger "Narrative Organizing: How We Shift Power Towards Justice", Weidinger shares that narrative organizing involves crafting and employing narratives to promote justice, equity, and democracy. Narratives are a series of observations without organizing. Narratives are powerful ways for individuals and communities to understand the world and their surroundings. Alignment around values, multiple voices, and community leadership braces community change.

According to this essay, narrative organizing fuels collective action across broad networks. Consider narratives surrounding the American dream and bootstrapping, as well as the reasons attributed to poverty–these narratives endure and exert a powerful influence on individual choices and policy decisions. Typically, the communities most impacted or marginalized do not control their narratives. **Narrative organizing aims to shift this power, enabling communities to take ownership of their narratives.**

Organizing centering narratives is a powerful way to bring together various groups around shared values using their own voices. Organizing accompanying narrative helps to solidify relationships across disparate communities.

Support Smaller Organizations to Fuel Systems Change

According to Small Organizations: The Change That Systems Change Needs, supporting smaller organizations interested and engaged in systems changes makes sense for a number of reasons including: smaller organizations are more numerous than larger organizations, builds a pipeline of organizations that are capable of doing systems work and greater opportunity to nurture and support those organizations.

In addition, having a more diverse group of organizations that are positioned or leading systems change provides a greater range of approaches and learning opportunities. The authors say that expanding the pool of grantees to involve smaller organizations would broaden the number of funders capable of providing support given their capacity for contributions. Widening the pool of organizations, leaders, practitioners, and funders strengthens the systems-change ecosystem through active participation and greater understanding of what works and lessons learned. The article also states **"the unique perspective of small, locally led organizations— their deep understanding of local challenges and opportunities, proximity to their communities, and organizational agility" has the ability to influence the field.**

Conclusion

The research underscores the importance of transformative capacity building, trust-based philanthropy, and supporting smaller grassroots organizations. Emphasizing culturally resonant relationships, addressing historical behaviors, and investing in leader well-being can significantly enhance the effectiveness of advocacy efforts. Flexible funding and streamlined processes can empower organizations to innovate and sustain their activities. By expanding the pool of grantees and focusing on systems change, funders can strengthen the ecosystem and support more equitable outcomes for marginalized communities. **These approaches not only foster deeper community impact but also drive long-term systemic change.**

"AGAINST A BACKDROP OF SYSTEMIC DISINVESTMENT AND OPPRESSION, WE MUST INVEST IN THE CAPACITY OF LOCAL LEADERS TO ADVANCE COMMUNITY VISIONS"

(LUQMAN AND CABRERA, 2022).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the data compiled in this report, direct feedback through interviews, and the research outlined in the national funding trends, we propose the following recommendations for funders, elected officials and governments, and advocacy and community organizing groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

Provide Multi-Year Unrestricted Funding

Multi-year, unrestricted funding allows organizations the flexibility to allocate resources where they are most needed, foster innovation, and build infrastructure for long-term systems-change work. This type of support enables sustained and adaptive efforts to transform communities, alleviating the ongoing concern about securing sufficient funding for their initiatives. Based on our findings, we recommend prioritizing multi-year funding for newly established grassroots community organizing groups. These groups face unique challenges in their early stages. By providing them with stable, long-term funding, funders can help ensure these organizations have the resources and support they need to grow and sustain their efforts for the long-haul.

Shift Power Dynamics & Embrace Trust-Based Philanthropy

Recognizing power imbalances and establishing trust between funders and grantees can lead to better outcomes organizationally and within the communities grantees serve.

Trust and power-sharing can be facilitated through streamlined applications and reporting processes, active learning about grantees' work and established feedback loops, and networking and resource support beyond financial contributions. Additionally, funders should adjust expectations to support the well-being of advocates and organizers and consider providing financial support for paid sabbaticals, retreats, and other well-being initiatives.

Prioritize Support for Black-Led and People of Color-Led Organizations

Organizations uniquely positioned to address systemic inequities impacting their communities, as detailed in the report, are those dedicated to racial justice and are primarily Black-led and People of Color-led. These organizations are likely to spearhead advocacy and organizing efforts that tackle the root causes affecting BIPOC communities, resulting in a more comprehensive and impactful approach.

Bolster Capacity Building

Organizations need increased capacity to enhance advocacy and organizing efforts, such as operations support, additional staffing, and the ability to test different approaches. With our recommendation to "strengthen partnerships and coalitions," our initial analysis revealed the necessity for more comprehensive resource and capacity assessments of coalition-building organizations. Respondents noted that systems-change efforts require more training, infrastructure development, and collaboration opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Nurture More Neighborhood & Place-Based Organizing

Our data indicates that a small percentage of community organizing groups focus on neighborhood and place-based organizing. While having a widespread focus across Memphis is beneficial, we encourage these groups to consider bringing community organizing efforts to the neighborhood level. We believe that neighborhood-based organizing can result in tailored solutions that better reflect neighborhood-specific needs. Additionally, this approach can help ensure that all high-poverty areas—like South City, which was not a focus for most organizers— receive the attention and support they require.

Strengthen Partnerships & Coalitions

Collaboration with advocacy and community organizing organizations creates a multiplier effect, enhancing effectiveness through diverse skills, networks, and additional people power. Our report shows that when organizations partner with others, they are more successful in implementing policy or systems change. Working together allows for more comprehensive solutions, builds solidarity, and creates a unified front to tackle systemic challenges and political barriers. Sharing best practices, strategies, and resources leads to more cohesive and impactful advocacy and community organizing.

We recommend that non-advocacy-specific nonprofits strengthen partnerships with advocacy and organizing groups to enhance capacity and connection to communities, improve direct services, and mitigate the risk of blowback from increased advocacy.

Enhance Training & Develop a Pipeline of Organizers

Enhancing training and skills development is essential for advocacy and community organizing groups to increase their impact. Our report shows many organizations need more training in power mapping, fundraising, policy analysis, and community engagement. Investing in these areas will help build the expertise needed to navigate complex advocacy landscapes, develop strategic campaigns, and mobilize communities effectively. We also recommend creating a pipeline to bring in new advocates and ongoing professional development for changemakers through training or fellowships. This investment strengthens individual organizations and contributes to a more resilient landscape overall.

Implement More Well-Being Supports for Organizers

Implementing more well-being supports for organizers is essential for retention and reducing burnout. The data in our report highlights that many organizers face significant stress and emotional strain, often leading to advocacy fatigue and reduced productivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION FOR ORGANIZATIONS (CONT.)

Implement More Well-Being Supports for Organizers (cont.)

Providing mental health resources, creating supportive organizational cultures, and ensuring fair compensation and work-life balance are critical steps to address these challenges. This focus on well-being not only benefits the organizers themselves but also enhances the overall effectiveness and sustainability of social change work.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS & GOVERNMENTS

Adopt a Collaborative & Open-Minded Approach

Backlash from elected officials surfaced as a significant issue for respondents, particularly grassroots community organizing groups. Proactive and constructive engagement with community-centered organizations, without those organizations fearing retribution, can lead to more effective and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Commit to Transparency in Decision-Making

While some elected officials may perceive advocates and organizers to be contrarian, it is important to recognize that transparency in decision-making helps establish trust and reduces adversarial relationships.

Creating opportunities for engagement and input early in the decision-making process can foster better models of co-governance and lead to stronger solutions.

Implement Protective Measures for Advocacy & Organizing Groups

As outlined in this report, advocacy and organizing groups face numerous barriers in their efforts to improve quality of life for Memphians. There has been a history of policies that create a chilling effect to silence these important voices in our communities. It is necessary to safeguard their right to speak out, protest, and lobby for change. This can be achieved through policies that reduce surveillance, ensure accountability for retribution by elected officials, and provide flexibility around public input.

Facilitate More Access to Resources & Information

Feedback indicated barriers to access, such as limited funding to a few organizations, restrictive funding requirements, and lack of policy knowledge. Although advocacy typically isn't government-funded, we encourage broader funding opportunities for advocacy and community organizing groups who also offer direct services. As these groups inform and engage communities, they are better able to mobilize and build power among directly impacted people while serving roles needed by public agencies.

CONCLUSION

Drawing from the insights gathered in the data analysis, this report captures a detailed portrait of the advocacy and community organizing landscape in Memphis. Through the surveys completed by 59 organizations, we have aimed to reveal where advocacy and organizing stands today and what supports are necessary, financially and otherwise, to enable their longevity and effectiveness. The key findings show an acute awareness and commitment by these organizations to address the needs of Memphians, particularly through a focus on the root causes of systemic issues. The trends and insights gained from the interviews indicated less than half of time dedicated to advocacy by the majority of organizations, but an expressed desire to commit more of their time and resources to advocacy.

The majority of those organizations who only participate in advocacy efforts operate with budgets over $2 million a year, versus community organizing groups who are far more likely to have an annual budget under $1 million. This highlights a resource landscape that is particularly challenging for community organizing groups and ripe for strategic funding for all organizations, particularly those whose focus is on education, housing, and racial justice.

The data also highlights the particular effectiveness of community organizing groups, especially those that engage directly-impacted people and use direct action as a tactic.

The trends also show the urgency of funding community organizing entities that are newly established, have annual budgets under $1 million, and/or have experienced significant to severe backlash from elected officials and their opponents.

As Memphis continues to navigate complex issues and advocacy landscapes, we are hopeful that the insights from this report will guide future strategies for funding, training, and resource allocation strategies. Given the difficult context statewide and nationally, the necessity of strategic, multi-year, sustained investment is more important now than ever. The path forward, while challenging, offers profound opportunities for deepened collaboration and community engagement, as well as systemic change to protect and further progress towards more opportunity, safety, and equity for all Memphians.

GIVEN THE DIFFICULT CONTEXT STATEWIDE AND NATIONALLY, THE NECESSITY OF STRATEGIC, MULTI-YEAR, SUSTAINED INVESTMENT IS MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER.

STRENGTHS & LIMITATIONS

Strengths

The advocacy & community organizing landscape received widespread support from advocacy & organizing groups, funders, and intermediaries serving the Memphis community. Our reach would not have been possible without the support of those who promoted the online survey with their networks. Thanks to the Hyde Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, Urban Child Institute, and Tennessee Nonprofit Network, the survey was distributed to groups and organizations that might not have otherwise been identified. This survey was made possible particularly because of the Kresge Foundation's support from the onset.

The strength of this landscape report lies in the fact that it was accessible to organizations to fill out the survey from anywhere online and at their convenience. Even though responses were initially slow to trickle in, our team was able to extend the deadline for the survey multiple times and afford opportunities to organizations to fill the survey out or alternatively offer their perspective through an interview.

The interviews to gain deeper insights were also performed virtually and at the discretion of organizational leaders' schedules. We were also able to share with leaders that nothing shared in the report would be personally identifying without their consent, enabling them to be honest and open with our team about their perspective.

Limitations

The main limitation of this report is that we were unable to receive completed surveys from as many grassroots community organizing groups as we hoped. Our team mapped out 31 organizations who we knew participate specifically in community organizing and are deeply rooted in communities in Memphis and/or are made up of directly-impacted people. We received responses from half of these organizations. While this is a reasonable amount, we acknowledge that our survey is more representative of grasstops advocacy organizations.

Moreover, our virtual interviews were limited to just five organizations that provided deeper insights into their survey responses and other relevant details. Out of twenty organizations that responded to our invitation, fourteen indicated their willingness to participate, resulting in a relatively small selection for in-depth interviews. Despite these limitations, we are confident that the data gathered is both comprehensive and insightful in its own right.

Lastly, several of the grassroots community organizing groups were difficult to reach as they did not have a website, social media presence, or publicly available contact information. Included in the list of grassroots organizations were several unions, none of which were able to fill out the survey. The result of this is a lack of perspective from labor unions in Memphis, which are a powerful and effective group in the advocacy & community organizing landscape in our community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT IN MEMPHIS, TN

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED

Please note that the listed organizations do not represent all those engaged in advocacy and/or community organizing in Memphis, nor do they represent all the groups we contacted. Additionally, only the organizations that consented to have their names included are listed in this report. A total of 59 organizations completed the survey.

- Agape Child & Family Services
- Alpha Omega Veterans Services, Inc.
- Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Memphis
- Christopher A. Pugh, II Center
- Clean Memphis
- Climate Reality Project: Memphis and Mid-South Chapter
- Collierville Citizens Police Association
- Epicenter
- Free Hearts
- Girls Inc. of Memphis
- Grace House of Memphis
- Habitat for Humanity of Greater Memphis
- HEAL901
- Homeless Organizing for Power & Equality (H.O.P.E.)
- Hospitality Hub
- I Am She Memphis
- Innovate Memphis
- KIPP Memphis Public Schools
- Le Bonheur Children's Hospital
- Le Bonheur/UTHSC
- Lifeline to Success, Inc.
- Memphis Community Against Pollution
- Memphis For All
- Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action & Hope (MICAH)
- Memphis Music Initiative
- Memphis Public Interest Law Center, Greater Memphis Housing Justice Project

- Memphis Shelby Crime Commission
- Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association (MIFA)
- Mid-South Immigration Advocates
- Music Export Memphis
- MyCityRides
- Naturally Nurtured Birth Charitable Services
- OutMemphis
- Overton Park Conservancy
- Protect Our Aquifer
- Reading with Mrs. Richardson
- Seeding Success
- Sister Supply
- SisterReach
- Su Casa Family Ministries
- Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC & TIRRC Votes)
- The Brotherhood B2M Memphis
- The Equity Alliance
- The Urban Child Institute
- UniverCity Family CDC
- West Cancer Foundation
- Whole Child Strategies, Inc.
- WYXR
- YWCA Greater Memphis
- Young, Gifted, & Green

THANKS TO ALL THE ORGS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THIS SURVEY. THIS REPORT WOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT *YOU*.

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Memphis Community Organizing Survey

This survey has been commissioned by a group of advocacy organizations and funders coordinated by Stand for Children Tennessee to learn more about the range of nonprofit advocacy in Memphis, Tennessee. It's our belief that all Memphians benefit when people left out of decision-making have the power and opportunity to transform communities. As community organizing is an essential component of creating community-driven change, we're seeking to learn more about groups and organizations like yours. The information collected will be used to inform grantmakers about funding opportunities, outreach strategies, and support for advocacy infrastructure. Please note: completing the survey does not guarantee future funding.

The aim of this survey is to better understand the depth and breadth of advocacy efforts in Memphis. We are interested in getting your input around the work your organization does, what strategies you use, and what populations you generally work with. We hope that the insights gained will enable us to enhance support, foster better coordination, and identify more supportive and informed funding opportunities. With your approval, your organizations will be named in the final report although data will be reported in aggregate - no individual responses will be shared.

For the sake of this survey, we're using this definition of advocacy: "The term 'advocacy' encompasses a broad range of activities that can influence public policy (including research, public education, lobbying, and voter education)." You can read more about what this encompasses in this factsheet by Bolder Advocacy.

This survey should take no more than 20 minutes of your time. Please complete this survey by March 31st, 2024.

What is the name of the group or organization you work with?

Would you like your organization's name to be featured in the final report? (No individual responses will be shared)

☐ Yes
☐ No

What is your name & title (Optional)

What type of group or organization do you work for?

☐ 501c3
☐ 501c4
☐ Neighborhood or local group
☐ Union
☐ Faith-Based Organization
☐ Fraternity or Sorority
☐ Other (please specify)

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

What type of direct services do you offer, if any? (Check all that apply)

□ Health services
□ Educational services
□ Social services
□ Community outreach
□ Employment & vocational services
□ Financial assistance
□ Legal services
□ Other (please specify)
□ None of the above

□ Family support services
□ Youth services
□ Senior services
□ Disability services
□ Mutual aid

How long has your group or organization been operating?

□ Less than 1 year
□ 1-5 years
□ 6-10 years
□ 11-15 years
□ 15+ years

Do you have a paid executive director?

□ Yes
□ No

If yes, how long has the current executive director been in that role?

□ Less than 1 year
□ 1-5 years
□ 6-10 years
□ 11-15 years
□ 15+ years

What is your group or organization's annual budget?

□ <$100,000
□ $100,000- $499,999
□ $500,000- $999,999
□ $1 million- $1.9 million
□ $2 million- $4.9 million

□ $5 million- $9.9 million
□ $10 million+

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Which areas of Memphis are you currently serving? (please select all that apply)

□ Downtown Memphis
□ Midtown
□ University District
□ East Memphis
□ North Memphis
□ South Memphis
□ Whitehaven
□ Southeast Memphis
□ All areas of Memphis

Which neighborhoods in Memphis are you currently serving? (please select all that apply)

□ Frayser
□ Raleigh
□ Nutbush
□ Midtown
□ Depot
□ University
□ Westwood
□ Whitehaven
□ Other (please specify)

□ Hickory Hill
□ Parkway Village
□ Sea Isle
□ Cordova
□ Klondike Smokey City
□ Soulsville
□ South City

Which population(s) are your issues & efforts focused around? (please select all that apply)

□ Asian American
□ Black of African Americans
□ Children and youth
□ Immigrant or refugee populations
□ Incarcerated or formerly incarcerated populations
□ Individuals with disabilities
□ Latino/hispanics
□ Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Queer (LGBQ+) persons
□ Low income families
□ Native Americans
□ Older adults (age 55+)
□ Pacific Islander
□ Other (please specify)
□ None of the above

□ People experiencing homelessness
□ Transgender or non-binary individuals
□ Veterans
□ Women and girls
□ Men and boys

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Does your organization engage in any of the following advocacy activities? (please select all that apply)

□ Attend local government meetings
□ Engage elected officials on policy issues
    related to mission
□ Engage political candidates on policy issues
    related to mission
□ Participate in voter registration drives
□ Distribute a political candidate questionnaire
□ Other (please specify)
□ None of the above

□ Participate or host day on the hill
□ Author a white paper or policy brief
□ Made a presentation to an elected official or
    appointed official
□ Legal action

How integral is advocacy to your organization's overall mission and activities?

□ Integral (Primary Focus)
□ Significant (a major part of our activities)
□ Moderate (one of several key activities)
□ Limited (a minor part of our activities)
□ Not applicable (we do not engage in advocacy)

How much of your organization's staff, time, and resources are devoted specifically to advocacy? (please select one)

□ All or nearly all of our staff time and resources
□ More than half of our staff time and resources
□ Less than half but still a substantial amount of our staff time and resources
□ A small amount of our staff time and resources

What is the scope of your advocacy work? (please select all that apply)

□ Local
□ Regional
□ State
□ National
□ International

If you do advocacy work, what are the issues you focus on? (please select all that apply)

□ Access for people with disabilities
□ Criminal justice system accountability
□ Employment

□ Housing
□ Immigrant services/rights
□ LGBTQIA+ rights

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

If you do advocacy work, what are the issues you focus on? (please select all that apply)

□ Education
□ Environmental issues
□ Food access
□ Gender Justice
□ Healthcare access
□ Other (please specify)

□ Police accountability
□ Racial justice
□ Reproductive justice
□ Transportation
□ Violence prevention/safety
□ Youth empowerment

Who do you partner with on advocacy? (please select all that apply)

□ Other advocacy organizations
□ Other non-profit organizations
□ Elected officials
□ Faculty members/teachers
□ Members of your organization
□ Other (please specify)
□ None of the above

□ Community organizers
□ Community leaders
□ Directly-impacted people
□ The private sector

We understand advocacy efforts can be a collaborative process. Who are some groups or organizations you typically partner with?

What networks or coalitions are you involved with to support your advocacy work?

□ Shelby County Voter Alliance (SCVA)
□ Moral Budget Coalition
□ Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action & Hope (MICAH)
□ Tennessee Nonprofit Network
□ BLDG Memphis
□ Other (please specify)
□ None of the above

How do you define and track success for your advocacy efforts?

□ Surveys
□ Listening sessions
□ Community assessment, etc.
□ Key performance indicators (policy changes,
   systems reforms, increased awareness, etc.)
□ Other (please specify)
□ None of the above

□ Case studies
□ Data analysis
□ Social media metrics
□ Budget impacts
□ Community empowerment and capacity building
□ Litigation and legal impact

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

What are the main challenges your organization faces in its advocacy work?

☐ Funding constraints
☐ Lack of staff or volunteers
☐ Limited public awareness or support
☐ Political or regulatory barriers
☐ Challenges in coalition-building
☐ Difficulties in measuring impact
☐ Other (please specify)

Can you provide examples of how your organization has adapted its strategies and response to changing community needs or political climates?

Has your organization been able to secure dedicated funding for advocacy?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Who funds your advocacy efforts? (please select all that apply)

☐ Crowdfunding
☐ Federal government funding
☐ State government funding
☐ Foundation: local or community
☐ Foundation: state-wide
☐ Foundation: family
☐ Other (please specify)

☐ Foundation: national
☐ Local or municipal funding
☐ Membership dues
☐ Personal donations
☐ Fundraising events

How can funders help meet your advocacy needs? (please select all that apply)

☐ Build connections across and/or between advocacy groups or non-profit organizations
☐ Share institutional knowledge
☐ Create funding streams that incentivize collaboration
☐ Advocacy project funding
☐ Leadership development
☐ Organizational development
☐ Other (please specify)

☐ Technical support
☐ Funding opportunities
☐ Staff support and retainment
☐ General operating support
☐ Remove rigid restrictions
☐ Training

Has there been anything that funders have done that have been helpful or requirements that have hindered your advocacy work?

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

How does your organization engage populations most impacted by the issues in which your organization is addressing?

□ Working with community members to identify solutions through outreach and relationship building
□ Hiring from within the community
□ Building networks among community members with diverse perspectives
□ Leadership development opportunities with community members
□ Elevating the voice of the population served in the decision-making process
□ Authentic community feedback
□ Developing partnerships between community and the organization
□ Organization leadership reflects the population served
□ Other (please specify)

Does your organization lead or participate in any of the following strategies or tactics? (please select all that apply)

□ Build power and capacity of community, members, or base
□ Conduct research, collect data and analysis to address community issues
□ Gather people to identify issues
□ Mobilize people to address issues and take action
□ Relationship and coalition building
□ Strategize and plan campaigns, tactics, actions
□ Providing individuals with the necessary tools and arming individuals with necessary tools
□ Gather people most impacted by decision making to identify specific challenges & barriers
□ Collaborate with orgs/individuals to change community conditions, policies, and/or programs
□ Other (please specify)
□ None of the above

In our community, here is a list of direct actions that have happened in our community. Check any or all of the following types of actions your organization or your membership is comfortable with.

□ Protesting in government building
□ Blocking the Bridge
□ Marching in the streets/blocking intersections of traffic
□ None

□ Protesting in front of Elected Official's house
□ Chaining yourself to concrete-filled barrel to block flow of economy/oil
□ Striking outside of workplace

Do you think direct action is important to influence or disrupt decision-makers from making harmful decisions on behalf of our community?

□ Yes
□ No
□ Maybe

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Does your organization have any top policy priorities for the next 1-2 years? If so, please describe.

Has your organization achieved any policy changes or systems reforms related to your issue area(s) in the last 1-2 years? If so, please describe the changes or reforms.

Are there new areas of advocacy or different strategies your organization plans to explore in the future? (please select all that apply)

□ Exploring new issue areas
□ Adopting different advocacy methods
□ Expanding geographic reach
□ Building more partnerships
□ Increasing community engagement
□ No plans for significant changes
□ Other (please specify)

Do you have any additional feedback or suggestions regarding supports for advocacy in Memphis?

Would you like to take the community organizing portion of this survey?

□ Yes
□ No

Community Organizing Portion

What issues are the focus of your organizing work? (please select all that apply)

□ Access for people with disabilities
□ Criminal justice system accountability
□ Employment
□ Economic security
□ Economic security
□ Environmental issues
□ Food access
□ Gender justice
□ Healthcare access
□ Housing
□ Immigrant services/rights
□ LGBTQIA+ rights
□ Police accountability
□ Other (please specify)

□ Racial justice
□ Reproductive justice
□ Transportation
□ Violence prevention/safety
□ Youth empowerment

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

What is your primary organizing focus?

□ Neighborhood/place-based organizing
□ Affinity/identity-based organizing
□ Issue-based organizing
□ Other (please specify)

Who do you organize with? Who is your base? (please select all that apply)

□ Advocacy organizations
□ Faculty members/ teachers
□ Members of your organization
□ Other community organizers or leaders
□ Other (please specify)

□ Residents
□ Religious or faith leaders
□ Students
□ Youth

Does your group or organization use a membership-based model? (select one answer)

□ Yes
□ No
□ Unsure

Do you have staff dedicated to building a base of directly-impacted people by the issues (community organizers)?

□ Yes
□ No
□ Unsure

How many paid community organizers do you have on staff?

□ 0
□ 1-2
□ 3-5
□ 6-9
□ 10+

What barriers do community organizers on staff face, if any? (Check all that apply)

□ Resource & financial constraints
□ Community engagement issues
□ Organizational barriers
□ Other (please specify)

□ Technology and infrastructure
□ Cultural sensitivity
□ Safety & security concerns
□ Burnout & well-being

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

How many volunteer community organizers does your organization have?

□ 0
□ 1-2
□ 3-5
□ 6-9
□ 10+

If there were no barriers, what goals would you pursue right now in your work (policy, base-building, etc.)?

What training or skills development would most help enhance your organizing and advocacy efforts?

□ Power mapping
□ Campaign strategy
□ Messaging/framing
□ Policy analysis and advocacy techniques
□ Digital advocacy and social media use
□ Volunteer coordination
□ Other (please specify)

□ Fundraising
□ Cultural competency and inclusivity training
□ Negotiation and conflict resolution
□ Community engagement and mobilization skills
□ Data analysis and evaluation
□ Coalition building

To what extent have you experienced backlash, opposition, or barriers when engaging in organizing or advocacy efforts? Indicate for each of the stakeholders below:

	No backlash, opposition, or barriers	Minimal backlash, opposition, or barriers	Moderate backlash, opposition, or barriers	Significant backlash, opposition, or barriers	Severe backlash, opposition, or barriers
Elected/government officials	○	○	○	○	○
Community members	○	○	○	○	○
Media outlets	○	○	○	○	○
Corporations	○	○	○	○	○
Non-governmental organizations	○	○	○	○	○
Other advocacy groups	○	○	○	○	○
Allies/supporters	○	○	○	○	○
Opponents	○	○	○	○	○

APPENDIX A: MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

How do you define and track success for your advocacy efforts?

☐ Surveys
☐ Listening session
☐ Community assessment, etc.
☐ Key performance indicators (policy changes, systems reforms, increased awareness, etc.)
☐ Case studies
☐ Data analysis
☐ Social media metrics
☐ Budget impacts
☐ Community empowerment and capacity building
☐ Litigation and legal impact
☐ Demographic and socioeconomic changes
☐ Conflict resolution and social cohesion
☐ Other (please specify)
☐ None of the above

Thank you so much for participating in our survey! If you'd like to receive a final copy of the aggregated survey results once they are complete (in late April).

Would you like us to send you a copy of the final report when it is completed in late April?

☐ Yes
☐ No

At what email address would you like to be contacted?

Would you be interested in participating in an interview either in-person or via zoom? We're hoping to learn more about what makes this work successful, what kind of data is collected, what additional supports are needed, etc. The interviews would take place in February and March 2024, and are expected to take less than 1 hour.

☐ Yes
☐ No

END OF SURVEY

APPENDIX B: VIRTUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

First, we'd like to start with a couple of questions about your approach and general structure of your organization.

1. What is your approach to community organizing/advocacy?
    a. Do you have a guiding framework or philosophy? Please tell me about it.

2. Could you elaborate on the strategies and tactics you use in community organizing? Some of the ones we listed in the survey are below, but feel free to expand on other tactics if that seems more appropriate:
    a. Build power
    b. Focus on institutional or systems change (local, regional, state, national levels)
    c. Gather people to identify issues
    d. Mobilize people to address issues and take action
    e. Strategize and plan campaigns, tactics, action
    f. Relationship and coalition building
    g. Data collection and analysis

2a. (ADVOCACY) Could you elaborate on the strategies and tactics you use in advocacy? Some of the ones we listed in the survey are below, but feel free to expand on other tactics if that seems more appropriate:
    a. Attend local government meetings
    b. Engage elected officials on policy issues related to mission
    c. Engage political candidates on policy issues related to mission
    d. Participate in voter registration drives
    e. Distribute a political candidate questionnaire
    f. Participate or host a day on the hill
    g. Author a white paper or policy brief
    h. Made a presentation to an elected official or appointed official
    i. Legal action

Thanks! Next, we'd like to learn more about how your organization is structured and how decisions are made.

3. What's the governance structure of your organization (i.e. board of directors, steering committee, political body, elected officials, etc.)
    a. Do you have organizing managers/do you have an expected number of leaders per organizer?

4. What is the decision-making process for choosing issues to work on, strategies or tactics to use, a policy agenda if you have one, for example. Do you use consensus, majority or something else? Who makes those decisions - your base/members/or leaders, or organization staff?

5. Does the demographic representation of your staff or leadership significantly reflect the population served?

6. Are paid organizers/advocates required to come in with certain skill sets? If so, what are they?

APPENDIX B: VIRTUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you! Now we'd like to ask a couple of questions about what is working and what would help your work be even more successful.

7. What makes your work successful? What infrastructure do you have in place?

8. What would make your work more successful?
    a. What is the biggest barrier you encounter in doing your work?
    b. How does your organization address challenges and barriers?
    c. What infrastructure do you want to get you where you want to be?

9. If you have paid organizers/advocates on staff–what is the average length of tenure with the organization?

10. What helps your organization to retain organizers/advocates on staff? What would help your retainment?

11. What professional development or training do you offer to paid organizers/advocates on staff? What kinds of professional development or training would you like to offer?

12. Are you able to support the wellbeing of paid organizers/advocates on staff? If so, how? If not, what would you like to do to be able to better support them?

13. How do you identify funding opportunities?

14. What is your organization's outlook on the future for Memphis? What gives you hope? What concerns you? Over the last few years, have you felt more hopeful or more despairing?

15. Is there anything else you want to tell us today?

Thank you again for your time! We sincerely appreciate your input. If you have any additional questions or think of anything else you want to say after this interview, please let us know by calling us or emailing us at alex@comentumstrategies.com or olliette@o2sps.com.

END OF VIRTUAL INTERVIEW

APPENDIX C: OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

Below, we've highlighted several open-ended survey questions along with selected responses for your review. Please note that not all responses are included for clarity, brevity, and relevance.

Question 27: Has there been anything that funders have done that have been helpful or requirements that have hindered your advocacy work?

- "The ability to use funds on what we need and not putting restrictions on fund usage has been very important."
- "Shifting from written interim reports to phone calls or videoconference check-ins and reducing the length and requirements of applications and final reports have been immensely helpful"
- "Forcing collaboration is rarely helpful. The most helpful thing is funding democracy building work."
- "Our funders have been gracious in providing additional funding for projects that require more staff capacity than what we're often able to complete ourselves. Hindrance - micro-managing advocacy strategy. Advocacy is not linear, nor is it 'polite'. Grassroots orgs must often push harder with elected officials to achieve their desired outcome. If funders are uncomfortable with orgs' strategy when a heavier lift is required, it places the orgs in an untenable situation to balance the effort needed to 'win' on a policy item vs maintaining funding."
- "Funders who are overly-restrictive in their grants, and refuse to provide general operating support or fund salaries are the least helpful and impactful."
- "Pinning us to outcome expectations over a short period of time. Oftentimes advocacy will result in incremental changes leading to the desired transformation. That takes time and it is not always a clear pathway."
- "Our funders never support the advocacy work. We have to find the funds by donations"
- "General operating support is always helpful! Grant reporting requirements over 3 pages becomes burdensome."
- "Simplifying Grant Application processes in the PRIVATE SECTOR has helped in our ability to secure funds without undue stress, whereas Govt grants seem to have become more complex and difficult."

Question 32: Does your organization have any top policy priorities for the next 1-2 years? If so, please describe.

- "To focus on rezoning many areas of SW Memphis where industrial pollutants continue to pollute & disrupt the community."
- "1. City and county establishes a Zero Waste Circular Economy goal. 2. Standardized Food Date Labeling by the FDA to prevent food loss. 3. Compost Procurement Policy for the city and county."
- "More funding support for youth-oriented organizations"
- "Challenging religious exemptions/freedom that are clearly conservative Fighting Christian Nationalism & white supremacy through mobilization and education Crafting policy on key issues Town Halls on legislative session Voter forums"
- "Transformation of criminal legal system with focus on re-entry (automatic expungement, voter restoration) and public safety (traffic-related safety ordinances); equity in school funding and student outcomes; high quality public transit system"
- "Increased funding for education, optimizing school footprint policy support for literacy & academic success for schools"
- "Reduce gun violence, increase community engagement in curbing crime, reduce juvenile delinquency"
- "A dedicated funding source for parks"

APPENDIX C: OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

Question 32 (cont.): Does your organization have any top policy priorities for the next 1-2 years? If so, please describe.

- "1-We want the Tennessee Valley Authority to stop their massive buildout of fossil gas power plants and pipelines, and switch to renewable energy sources like solar and battery storage. 2-Addressing and spreading awareness about any environmental threats to our local communities."
- "Promote access to comprehensive sex education and sexual health services. Advance menstrual equity. Combat Sexual harassment and violence. Reform school discipline policies and practices. Increase access to postsecondary education. Improve access for girls and other underrepresented groups to meaningful opportunities to pursue all career paths. Increase funding for out-of-school learning. Increase access to mental health and wellness support for students. Combat that persistent stigma surrounding mental health issues and treatment."
- "Advocating for cultural designations for music venues at the city level; advocating for a city level policy around compensation for live performance"
- "Renter rights restoration"
- "Increase funding for voter education, public education, and other public services (pass the Moral Budget), stop the legislative attacks on our democracy, stop the School Voucher Bill, eliminate the Grocery Tax and other regressive fees, close corporate tax loopholes to make corporations pay what they owe in taxes to fund our community's most urgent needs. Implement partisan primaries and/or mayoral runoff elections, eliminate city council Super Districts"
- "Increased access to public benefits such as WIC and SNAP and Tenncare and TANF; increased access to child care; reducing food insecurity"
- "Removing barriers to voter restoration"
- "Increasing flow of resources to the creative economy through investment, infrastructure and policy change - Solidify workforce development pathways for youth interested in careers in the creative economy"
- "1) Reinstate gender affirming care access for Tennessee minors + enshrine healthcare rights for trans Tennesseans. 2) Engage LGBTQ+ people in the local and state electoral process, 3) Build and amplify a Tennessee coalition for LGBTQ+ policy work, 4) Create storytelling opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals underrepresented in the larger LGBTQ+ movement, 5) Educate national LGBTQ+ organizations/agencies about strategies needed in red states and communities in Southern states. 6) Educate shelby county electeds on LGBTQIA+ concerns and platforms."
- "Create a coalition of veteran groups and all work together toward solving veteran problems in reintegration into the work force & society"
- "Review parole board"
- "Continue to bring awareness of ACEs"
- "Continuing work to streamline TN Drivers' License process for motor scooters - simplifying and ultimately uncoupling this DL from standard license suspension activities"
- "Restructuring MLGW commercial water rate structure - progressive rates. Increase permit fees for the SCHD Water Quality Branch"
- "Add menstrual products to the tax free weekend"

APPENDIX C: OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

Question 32 (cont.): Does your organization have any top policy priorities for the next 1-2 years? If so, please describe.

- "Dedicated source for Affordable Housing Trust Fund Updates to Neighborhood Preservation Act Zoning ordinance amendments"

Question 33: Has your organization achieved any policy changes or systems reforms related to your issue area(s) in the last 1-2 years? If so, please describe the changes or reforms.

- "We have led the charge in getting ordinances passed by the city council and county commission."
- "Successfully advocated for funding to advance the Waste Study that is the foundation for the Zero Waste Circular Economy goal. Expansion of the Share Table Policy for Memphis Shelby County Schools to ensure surplus food is being rescued and provided to students who are experiencing food insecurity. Successfully completed a pilot with the City of Memphis regarding using compost in parks as a way to reduce maintenance costs."
- "We have helped with amending HIV criminalization bills this session. We continue to position SisterReach as a go-to resource legislators can tap for messaging and analysis."
- "Dedicated municipal funding for public transit; youth justice commitments from elected justice officials for reducing youth transfer to adult court and introducing restorative justice practices; first conviction integrity unit in Shelby County (second in TN)."
- "Passed a state law in 2022 expanding professional licenses to immigrant populations; secured public funding for immigration legal services; defeated anti-immigrant bills; won court cases for victims of worksite raids."
- "Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement - this was a long-term policy push that focused on the need to revamp the state funding formula to better meet the needs of students. MSCS Superintendent Search - we'd advocated for a few years to successfully complete a national search for superintendent."
- "By working in coalition with other organizations, we helped to stop the Byhalia Pipeline, achieved new laws at the city and county levels, got several concessions from the Tennessee Legislature on a pipeline bill, helped encourage Sterilization Services of Tennessee to close their Memphis operations which emit toxic Ethylene Oxide."
- "Different impacts locally across the country: we endorsed Tami Sawyer, worked with Decarcerate Memphis to pass a traffic ordinance, supported police accountability in the Jaylin McKenzie case, supported Pervis Payne's family."
- "Changes through legislation. More community engagement through forums, Walks Against Gun Violence, school assemblies."
- "We mobilized residents and activists to demand change in the school superintendent search process, leading to the selection of a trusted candidate approved by the board and the community. Passed several police reform ordinances through City Council in 2023, including a ban on pretextual traffic stops sponsored by our former board member and endorsed candidate for city council, Michelin Easter-Thomas. Implemented the first public input process for City Council redistricting and recruited community leaders to serve on the redistricting committee. Increased funding for voter education after statewide redistricting changes impacted over 80% of voters from Shelby County Government. Passed local budgetary allocation to purchase modernized voting equipment and conducted a county-wide education program on the use of new voting machines. Collaborated with County Mayor Harris to place 12 voter registration kiosks in public service government buildings."

APPENDIX C: OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

Question 33 (cont.): Has your organization achieved any policy changes or systems reforms related to your issue area(s) in the last 1-2 years? If so, please describe the changes or reforms.

- "Increased discretionary funding for the Affordable Housing Trust."
- "We have seen an increase in the amount of funding dedicated to parks in the city park system, mostly for capital projects. We are hoping this forecasts a trend to support ongoing park operations and maintenance with a more robust budget."
- "Voice in child tax credit. Convening of Legislative Table of politicos to address economic mobility, health and safety, education, transportation, and childcare barriers for Memphians."
- "We added an Injured Officer Fund for line of duty life-threatening injuries."
- "Local solution to food access; TIF Community Engagement reform; Community-Centered Participatory Budgeting."
- "Instrumental in removing slave language from the constitution and passed the Anti-shackling bill."
- "The institution of a liaison for arts and culture on the county level; advocating for the institution of an office for arts and culture on the city level; advocating for the reconfiguration and restart of the Greater Memphis Chamber Arts and Entertainment Think Tank; co-hosting Mayoral Candidate Forum on the Arts."
- "We are the lead plaintiff in litigation to overturn a statute that criminalizes sex workers living with HIV. Last year, we were one of many leaders in a coalition to restore federal HIV prevention funding to Tennessee. We work with lawyers, providers, and funders to navigate transgender minors to gender care access out of state. These may not yet be policy changes or systems reforms, but they are needed efforts against a tide that no one has yet stopped."
- "Memphis Commissioners approved testing all schools in Shelby County for lead. If schools tested above the approved lead percentage, they turned the water off and replaced the pipes."
- "We successfully proposed and obtained legislation in 2023 that streamlines the licensing process for the type of vehicle (scooter) used in our program. BIG WIN."
- "Inclusion of public comment to Groundwater Board meeting agendas. Rejection of TVA's never-ending contract."
- "Nine zoning ordinance updates."
- "We have received two annual provider rate increases after a 20+ year oversight."
- "Working with YWCA across the state, we have helped bring some reform and law changes for victims of intimate partner domestic violence."

Question 45: If there were no barriers, what goals would you pursue right now in your work (policy, base-building, etc.)?

- "Identifying and preparing Reproductive Justice based elected officials to run for office"
- "Base-building, fundraising, increasing impacted leaders"
- "Policy wins at the state legislature and federal level"
- "Changing the TVA's energy focus from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Stopping the TVA's trucking of toxic coal ash through residential streets and convincing them to move it off of the Memphis Sands Aquifer to a safer storage site on solid rock. Encourage local city and county governments to pass legislation that would force the TVA to hold actual public participation meetings and be more transparent, and to provide a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for their coal ash removal."

APPENDIX C: OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

Question 45 (cont.): If there were no barriers, what goals would you pursue right now in your work (policy, base-building, etc.)?

- "More community engagement, more research on best practices, more reliable data collection"
- "Hiring a policy coordinator, operations director, training director, and communications director, all equipped with adequate annual budgets to pursue our organizational goals"
- "If we had capacity, we would organize around a dedicated funding source for parks, so that every Memphis resident would have access to a well-built and well-maintained, free public park, with relevant programming and exciting opportunities for young people to learn, volunteer, and work. We would achieve this with a dedicated funding source"
- "Addressing homelessness; a food bank"
- "Salary/wage increase, equity in education, quality healthcare. accessible and affordable childcare, and quality affordable housing"
- "Continue boots on the ground social cohesion work; resident organizing training; neighborhood council building"
- "Equip with trades—learning a trade equips individuals with practical skills that are in demand in various industries. These increased skill sets make individuals more attractive to employers"
- "Decoupling Motor Scooter licenses from standard license suspension"

APPENDIX D: EXPANDED HISTORY OF ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING IN MEMPHIS

There is a rich—and courageous—history of advocacy and community organizing in Memphis, Tennessee, that dates back to the city's early years. It is largely an unfamiliar through line in our city's history, telling the story of a people who valiantly pushed for change in the face of a system designed specifically to prevent it and to stop their own self-determination. Whatever they confronted—oppression, a massacre, lynchings, a political boss, and Jim Crow—generations of Memphians covertly but always persistently defied pressures, racism, and violent opposition to advocate for better lives and to organize to control their own destinies.

This history inspires us today as Memphians build on this heritage to define and mobilize today's advocacy and organizing movement. If there is any prevailing theme that can be taken from 160 years of Memphis advocacy and organization it is this: All things are possible. Despite overwhelming barriers, African Americans have relentlessly pushed towards their north star—full rights, equality, and opportunity—and proved that progress can be made.

This legacy of advocacy—the strongest possible kind—began in the Civil War. Memphis served as a harbor for newly freed enslaved African Americans and for slaves escaping Mid-South plantations, increasing the Black population of Memphis from 17 to 39%. This surge spiked after the one-day Battle of Memphis led to the city's immediate surrender to Union rule. In an ultimate act of advocacy, more than 7,000 African Americans joined the Union Army. At the same time, they did not have freedom of where to live in the segregated city and were relegated to certain "Negro Quarters" of Memphis. Several of these quarters grew into community hubs, where doctors, dentists, lawyers, and other professionals could be found. One such community rose up around Beale Street, which gained legendary status as a center of African American commerce and culture.

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Even in the wake of the three-day Memphis Massacre of 1866—when scores of African Americans were murdered, wounded, and raped by an Irish mob—with the advent of Reconstruction, men lined up to register to vote and successfully ran for local and state offices. All this was accomplished while Jefferson Davis, the former president of the Confederacy, lived in Memphis. The lives these African Americans built is a testament to their willingness to take a stand against all that Davis stood for.

Reconstruction ended in 1877 when Union troops withdrew from the South. With the end of this promising era in American history, the targets on the backs of activist Black Memphians were profound. But they were not deterred from organizing to continue to make incremental gains. Despite exploitation and white intransigence, they were determined to share the civil and social rights they had been granted by the Emancipation Proclamation.

Almost simultaneously, Memphis was trapped in wave after wave of yellow fever until half of the 47,000 residents had moved away. In the midst of the citywide crisis that united most Memphians, leaders of the Black community were able to place the first African American patrolmen on the Memphis Police Department, where they remained until 1895.

Because of yellow fever, debt, corruption, and mismanagement, Memphis lost its charter in 1879. But before then, as a result of Reconstruction, Black men served on the Board of Common Councilmen—two in 1872, four in 1873, and six in 1874, who served until 1879. That year, African American voting power was diluted by the taxing district set up by state government when Memphis lost its charter.

The symbolism was not lost on anyone in Memphis when it was a former enslaved man turned extraordinarily successful entrepreneur, Robert Reed Church, who bought the first bond that restored the city's charter. Equally important, he was a force for advocacy and organizing, using his fortune to fund high-quality facilities for Black Memphians banned by segregation from white institutions. He developed a public park, a playground, a concert hall, and an auditorium. Through his bank, the first Black-owned one in Memphis, he extended credit so African Americans could buy homes and develop businesses. The first Black elected official after yellow fever was elected in 1882 and served until 1886. He was Memphis' last African American elected official until 1964. In the 1880s and 1890s, five Black men were elected to the Tennessee Legislature

From the 1870s to 1890s, there were at least four Black newspapers in Memphis, notably the one where legendary journalist Ida B. Wells fearlessly campaigned against lynching and wrote about racist attacks in the city. In fear of her life, she ultimately fled Memphis and did not return for 30 years. Today she is a journalistic icon, and in 1990, her advocacy was recognized with the issuance of a U.S. stamp in her honor. As Ms. Wells was leading through journalism, other Memphians' advocacy focused on education, as "Sabbath schools" evolved into formal educational institutions. By the early 1900s, African American organizing had produced 11 elementary schools, one high school, and two post-secondary institutions, with departments of medicine, law, dentistry, pharmacy, and nursing.

Robert Church Sr.'s son, Robert Church Jr., was a strong advocate for African American participation in the political system. Nicknamed the "Colossus of Beale Street," Church founded the Lincoln League with several other Black business and professional men. They worked to organize African American political power inside the Republican Party.

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Efforts included organizing voter drives and voting schools and paying poll taxes. Mass meetings were held in Church Park Auditorium, and in 1916, roughly 1,600 African Americans from Memphis-Shelby, Hardeman, Tipton, and Fayette counties sponsored a ticket in the 1916 election. Although it lost, it led to the creation of a national Lincoln League and racial solidarity.

Ultimately, Church's political power was challenged by the political machine of E.H. "Boss" Crump, whose political fortunes depended on Black votes. Over time, Crump no longer saw Black Republicans as a political asset and engaged in more and more racist rhetoric and actions. He devised a scheme accusing Church of alleged non-payment of back taxes, and Church moved away from Memphis in 1940. That same year, Crump harassed wealthy drug store owner J.B. Martin, who was planning a multiracial rally for the GOP presidential candidate. Crump sent in the police, who searched customers at Martin's store. Sixty people were arrested for specious charges, and Crump spread rumors that Martin was selling drugs and spreading ideas of "social equality." The federal government refused to prosecute.

It is impossible to overstate the atmosphere of oppression and rigid social strictures that faced these champions of change and their courage in pursuing their rights as Americans. Their organizing and advocacy were taking place in a city that solidly adhered to Jim Crow laws enforcing segregation. And about two dozen lynchings took place in the area from the Civil War until the 1930s.

The irony of the times was that Black Memphians were serving in the armed forces in World War II and supported war bond drives and scrap metal drives at theaters like the Palace on Beale Street. Black Memphians raised $303,000 to build a B-24 bomber. A Booker T. Washington graduate, who flew combat missions with the Tuskegee Airmen, was honored in 1945 with a key to the city and a parade attended by 22,000 people. In 1960, he became the first African American air traffic controller at Memphis International Airport.

As thousands of Black Memphians returned to Memphis as experienced professionals with military training and college education, they were not content with a segregated city. They advocated for full participation in public life. In 1948, nine African American men were appointed to the police force and became the first to patrol the streets since the late 1800s.

Historic change occurred in 1954. Boss Crump died in October, only five months after the national NAACP won its case before the U.S. Supreme Court that "separate but equal" schools were not constitutional. Memphis found ways to circumvent the ruling, but the decline of the Crump machine opened up a new era of more powerful Black political power. By 1959, the Volunteer Ticket—a local, all African American, and unaffiliated political party—ran a ticket for elected office that included Benjamin Hooks, Russell Sugarmon, A.W. Willis, Roy Love, and Henry Clay Bunton. Their campaign was backed by a rally at Mason Temple that boasted 1,000 in attendance, a 1,000-member choir, and a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. None of the Volunteer Ticket candidates were elected, but it was clear that times were changing. In the past, there was deference given to the Crump political machine, but the new Black youth movement had no interest in it. Their goal was a truly integrated Memphis.

In 1957, Maxine Smith and Laurie Sugarmon applied for graduate school at the all-white Memphis State University.

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Despite extraordinary undergraduate degrees from prestigious Northern colleges, they were denied entry into the university. But less than a decade later, Sugarmon became the university's first Black faculty member. Allegra Turner fought to have her children admitted to private Catholic schools, and Christian Brothers High School became the first desegregated high school in Memphis. In 1962, Maxine Smith became the first executive secretary of the local NAACP and an outspoken advocate for change.

Also in 1957, the Memphis Committee on Community Relations was formed. The moderate, interracial group of community leaders set the goal of addressing civil rights issues. It advocated for more African American members of city and county boards, worked for African American admission to local hospitals, expressed concern about police brutality, and advocated for integrating businesses and public facilities. It moved too slowly for many. In 1960, 41 African American college students entered the public library on a Monday (they were supposed to go only on Black Thursdays) and were arrested. Black boycotts and the picketing of white businesses followed. A few months later, Memphis agreed to end segregation on public buses, in libraries, and at the zoo. Plans began for the Mid-South Coliseum, which included integrated seating, restrooms, and concession stands. Thirteen Black first graders brought token integration to Memphis public schools in the fall of 1961, resulting in tens of thousands of white students withdrawing.

1968 ushered in a new era of urgency and advocacy in Memphis when two sanitation workers were crushed to death by a malfunctioning garbage truck compactor while sheltering from the rain. Within days, 1,300 sanitation workers walked off their jobs in an act of defiance that stunned white Memphians, who were confident that Mayor Henry Loeb would deal with the situation. Instead, national media attention to the workers' intolerable working conditions, growing local outrage, and involvement of national unions elevated the workers' right to unionize. This culminated in Dr. King coming to Memphis to speak to 17,000 people on March 18 and announcing a march to be held a few days later. Activists faced threats and curfews. They were arrested for sit-ins at City Hall, for blocking roads, and for jaywalking. Despite sentences and fines for contempt of court, Dr. King led a march on March 29 that was cut short by the fatal police shooting of a 16-year-old boy. Loeb refused to budge, and his comments inflamed tensions. The rescheduled march never took place because Dr. King was murdered at the Lorraine Motel on April 4. Afterwards, the federal government took charge of strike mediation and settled the strike on April 16.

After Dr. King's murder, the African American community applied even more pressure on the white establishment to increase African American hiring. When they refused, boycotts and pickets followed and a majority of the companies agreed. In 1969, the NAACP led "Black Monday" boycotts against Memphis City Schools in a campaign to secure equal representation on the all-white school board. When the school district refused, the NAACP urged students not to attend classes on Mondays and 67,000 students followed through. The district relented and created two at-large positions on the board with one filled by Maxine Smith, executive director of the Memphis branch of the NAACP.

This stepped-up advocacy produced major progress in the 1970s. African Americans were elected to local and national offices, climaxed in 1975 with the election of Harold Ford, the first African American from Tennessee elected to the U.S. Congress. By the 1990s, Black Memphians held a majority of elected offices, including the first elected African American Memphis mayor in 1992. African Americans turned their attention to translate political successes into public policy changes that were needed to improve the lives of Memphians.

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Today in Memphis, 42% of African American households live in poverty or are part of the working poor. Despite success at the polls for African Americans, more progress is needed in public policies regarding health, education, economic parity, neighborhood revitalization, and more.

That is where the importance of advocacy and organizing lies today. Ultimate success will be seen in the adoption of more progressive public policies that deal with the roots of the problems—not just the symptoms.

A direct line runs through Memphis' history of advocacy and organizing, from its early days during the Civil War to the modern burst of activism. The Memphis Advocacy and Community Organizing Survey—and its information, data, and recommendations—continues that line. The survey's analysis provides vital information about the wide range of advocacy organizations and their initiatives, philosophies, and priorities. This survey will serve as a tool to inform funding, to suggest potential collaborations, and to influence public policy.

Special Note from the survey commissioners:

*Thank you to Tom Jones, Principal of Smart City Consulting
and editor/primary writer of the Smart City Memphis blog,
for contributing his wealth of knowledge and insight on the history,
landscape, and future of Memphis advocacy and community organizing.*

END OF APPENDIX D

ABOUT STAND FOR CHILDREN- TENNESSEE

Stand for Children Tennessee is a unique catalyst for education equity and racial justice, aiming to create a brighter future for all. Since 1999, Stand members in Tennessee have achieved 23 state and local victories, leveraging over $150 million in public funding to benefit more than 1.38 million children. Their work focuses on improving Tennessee schools through legislative and electoral victories, advocating for policies that promote educational equity and youth justice reform, and addressing systemic issues like the school-to-prison pipeline. As they continue their efforts, Stand for Children Tennessee is expanding their focus to include broader racial justice initiatives, ensuring their advocacy aligns with the needs of the communities they serve.

ABOUT O2 STRATEGIC PARTNERS

O2 Strategic Partners is a boutique consultancy deeply rooted in creativity and hope, dedicated to forging new pathways inspired by radical imagination. Founded by Olliette Murry-Drobot, a visionary leader with over two decades of experience catalyzing systemic change in the realms of social justice and the nonprofit sector, the consultancy embodies an unwavering commitment to equity. Specializing in facilitation, training, and project management, O2 collaborates closely with social justice organizations, member-based entities, advocacy groups, and mission-driven organizations. O2 Strategic Partners utilizes strategic and collaborative processes for planning and decision-making and spearheads multifaceted initiatives across a spectrum of issues, spanning environmental justice, reproductive justice, racial equity, HIV prevention, education reform, community building, and other issues. O2 designs and delivers training that places equity at the forefront, helping organizations to craft strategies, refine board governance practices, and enhance community engagement efforts. Olliette holds certifications in Results-Based Facilitation and Diversity; Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging; along with accreditation as a Standards for Excellence Licensed Consultant.

ABOUT CO•MENTUM STRATEGIES

Co•mentum Strategies is a political and advocacy consulting firm founded in 2022 by policy strategist and community organizer Alex Hensley. Serving over 20 clients across advocacy, political, and nonprofit sectors, Co•mentum is dedicated to advancing liberation for all through the development of justice-centered leaders and community-led strategies. Alex now runs a course called the Strategy Studio to help justice-centered leaders learn the skills to draft policy, build coalitions, and prioritize their well-being. Her experience includes drafting and co-leading the successful passage of 10+ laws, including the police accountability ordinances following the death of Tyre Nichols, historic oil pipeline regulation to protect the Memphis Sands Aquifer, "Ban the Box" to provide formerly incarcerated people with jobs in Shelby County Government (SCG), and the first-ever dedicated investment in public transit from SCG. To learn more about opportunities to work with Co•mentum Strategies, please email alex@comentumstrategies.com.