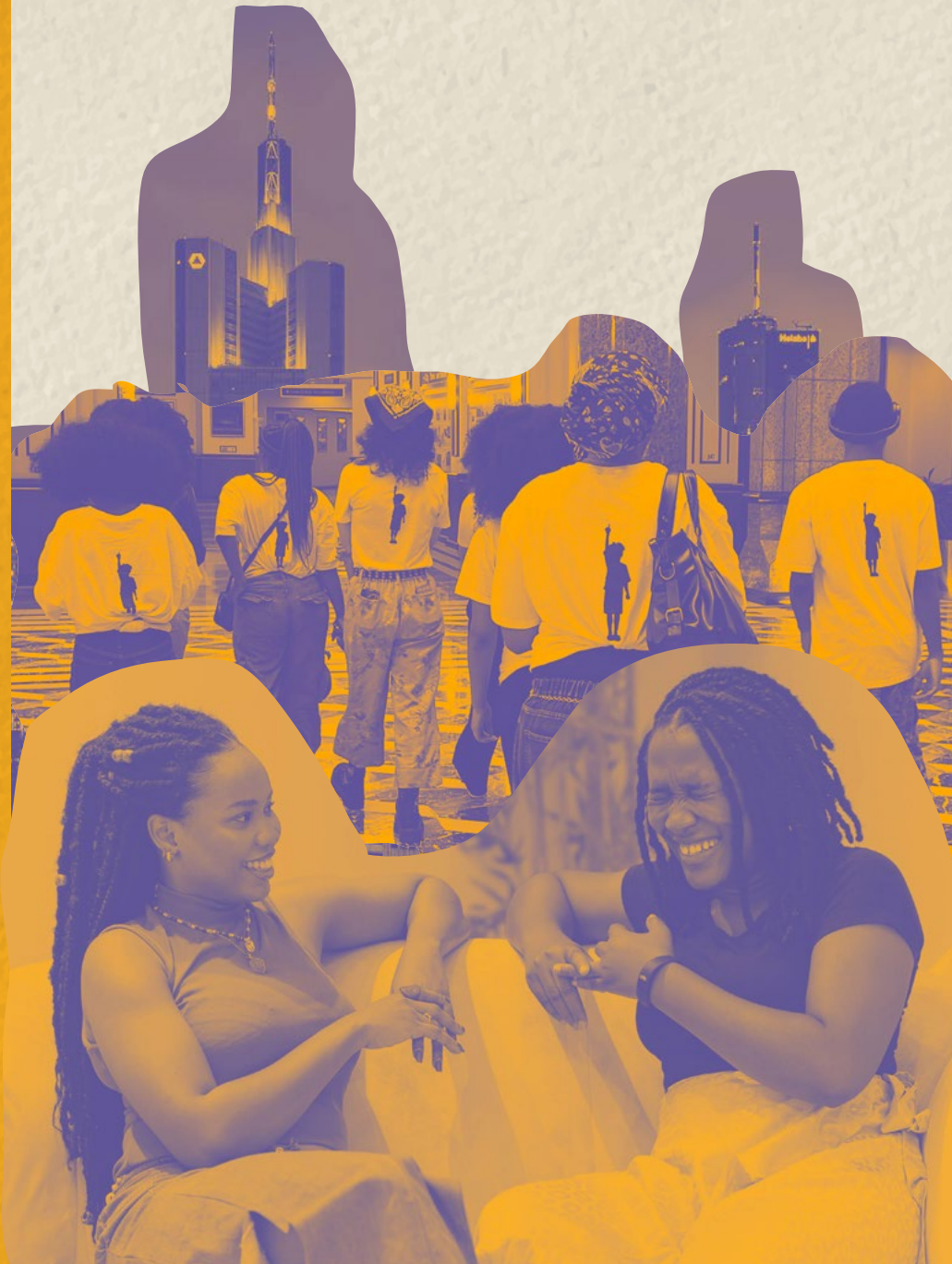


# 2025 NATIONAL YOUTH ORGANIZING FIELD SCAN

## Snapshot 3:

From Surge to Structure –  
Building a Base That Holds



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**"POWER PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD  
IS NOTHING BUT THE ABILITY TO  
ACHIEVE PURPOSE. IT IS THE  
STRENGTH REQUIRED TO BRING  
ABOUT SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND  
ECONOMIC CHANGE."**

**- DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.**

# POWER IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VICTORY AND DEFEAT

There is no shortage of energy in the youth organizing field. Propelled by moral clarity amid deepening crisis conditions, young people are stepping into organizing with urgency, taking on campaigns and growing as leaders in ways that reflect the field's long-term investment in leadership development. But even as leadership grows, a fundamental question remains: how does that leadership translate to power? How do we not end up marching for the same things every few years?

Power is not built through individual leaders alone, no matter how skilled or committed. Instead, the path to power requires millions of people to get organized as part of mass social movements, collectively working toward a shared vision. In other words, it will require the youth organizing field to double down on base-building: the work of building a people-powered membership base of support that is capable of sustaining and wielding the power at the scale needed to win.

History offers a clear throughline. While we often recall movement's most visible flashpoints — mass protests, boycotts, major wins — the reality is these moments were made possible by the steady work of building a strong membership base over time. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), for example, grounded its work in sustained base-building: door-knocking, mass meetings, leadership development, and voter registration drives carried

out over years. As one SNCC organizer described it, “We spend days at a time visiting Negro homes in the backcountry. We talk, we talk, and we talk.”

Labor movement leader Dolores Huerta similarly credits the many years spent by United Farm Workers hosting house meetings and community meetings as the key that unlocked their ability to mount their historic grape strike and boycott, and eventually win union contracts. As Huerta reflected, “We are always building our base. That is the key to organizing.”

*These histories underscore a central lesson: movements do not win because people show up in moments. They win because they are organized between them.*



These histories underscore a central lesson: movements do not win because people show up in moments. They win because they are organized between them. Mobilizations may make individuals feel powerful, but this does not inherently translate to power. A large and organized base with a capacity to contest the power of the system is ultimately what allows movements to sustain momentum via consistent action, withstand attacks and repression, make demands and ensure their implementation, and build and wield durable power over time.

In the youth organizing field today, this lesson carries particular weight. The field has made important strides in developing leaders and mobilizing communities. In the 21st century, we have seen multiple waves of leadership development and mobilization around immigration, police violence, gender justice, climate, gun violence, and other issues.

To consolidate this energy into lasting power will require the youth organizing field to place focus on building bases at the scale and depth necessary to lead communities, sustain campaigns, and ultimately win structural change.



# WHAT EXACTLY IS BASE-BUILDING?

For many, the analysis on building people power appears to be a basic formula: more people equals more power. In reality, the work of base-building is more nuanced. As FCYO's Power to Win framework lays out, it is the intentional activation of members to engage in campaigns and alliances as part of a strategy grounded in a clear assessment of conditions.

Key fundamentals include:

1. **Long-Term Strategic Orientation:** An actionable, time-bound plan for how an organization builds power to move from present realities to its vision for change. This may include several phases of work, but should be sufficiently rooted in time, place, and conditions to be used as a measure for assessing progress and making adjustments as needed.
2. **Power Analysis:** A concrete assessment of key economic, political, and social levers of power, the constituencies tied to those levers, and an understanding of the size, nature, and commitment of the membership base that is needed to pull those levers.
3. **Recruitment:** Ongoing activities to grow an organization's membership in a manner that is in accordance with their long-term strategy and power analysis.
4. **Engagement:** Guided by their long-term strategy, an organization's campaigns should move significant numbers of both members and the broader community into action.
5. **Leverage:** Clarity on and engagement in the strategic and tactical alliances that unite constituencies and allow for an organization to pull the levers identified in its power analysis and achieve its demands.



For the 2025 Field Scan, we asked organizations to share reflections on their base-building practices, with a focus on the fundamentals identified above.

Across our conversations, organizers consistently pointed to the unique role young people play in this work. Their power lies not only in organizing their peers, but in their ability to activate entire communities — families, schools, neighborhoods, and broader constituencies. As one youth organizer put it, “Youth organizing is about being politicized, being politically aware, educated, and through that building power through one-on-ones...It takes heart-to-hearts. It takes reckoning with your own values. It takes self-reflection and analyzing. It takes courageous conversations. It takes courageous action. And that’s possible. That’s possible no matter who you are, and very much possible for young people.”

“The role of young people should be that they should be deeply engaged in leading their base-building work in their local communities,” another noted.

At the same time, many organizers identified a persistent challenge: base-building is often uneven, inconsistent, or deprioritized in practice. “There’s lots of missed opportunities,” one organizer reflected, citing the field’s tendency to place an “overemphasis on empowerment rather than building real power that changes material conditions, or relegating youth to only organizing their peers...rather than their whole communities.”

While leadership development prepares individuals to lead, base-building determines whether organizations can aggregate that leadership into a force capable of shaping lasting social change. In Snapshot 3: From Surge to Structure — Building a Base That Holds, we build on Snapshot 2’s focus on leadership development to examine the practices, structures, and strategic choices through which organizations translate leadership into collective capacity.

“It takes heart-to-hearts. It takes reckoning with your own values. It takes self-reflection and analyzing. It takes courageous conversations. It takes courageous action. And that’s possible. That’s possible no matter who you are, and very much possible for young people.”



# BUILDING POWER TO LAST THE LONG HAUL

Building durable long-term power to transform society requires long-term strategies.



We are, as one focus group participant noted, in the midst of “another student movement time and peak of student activism and voice raising and engagement.” The mass mobilizations and the waves of protests in the past decade reflect a widespread desire to take action and be a part of bold movements for social change. Many young people, organizers told us, have already participated in (and in many cases led) protests, walk-outs, and other social change activities. “Talking to young people, I’ll be like, ‘Oh, have you ever tried to make change? And they’re like, ‘Yeah, I actually ran this entire legit six-month campaign,’” one organizer said. “When I was in eighth grade, ninth grade, that was not true. That gives me a ton of hope for the field.”

This level of engagement signals a significant shift in political participation. But as noted earlier, energy and participation does not automatically translate into power. The challenge facing the youth organizing field is how to harness this energy and convert it into a sustained, organized force capable of winning structural change. As one organizer told us, “There are deep, deep challenges around practice, rigor, and sustainable action in our movement.”

Over the past decade, the field has, in many cases, shifted away from core power-building practices, prioritizing short-term mobilization and rapid response over organizing grounded in long-term strategy. This tension between immediacy and durability sits at the center of current base-building challenges.



# A LONG-TERM STRATEGIC ORIENTATION IS THE FOUNDATION FOR LONG-TERM POWER-BUILDING

At its core, a long-term strategic orientation is a clear, time-bound plan for how an organization builds power to move from current conditions to its vision for change. It defines not only what an organization is fighting for, but how it will build the power necessary to win.

Most organizations (83%) report having a long-term strategic orientation guiding their work. Asked about their vision for change, two-thirds of organizations shared that their work is rooted in the belief that our current social, political, and economic system can and should be transformed by working within and outside it to change how it functions.

## Organizations' Long-Term Strategy Timeframes

1 to 3 years:

**26%**

3 to 5 years:

**35%**

5 to 10 years:

**23%**

10 years or more:

**10%**

*"If we don't have these long-term, multi-decade strategic plans about how we're going to build power in the long term, we will not build any power."*

## Organizations' Long-Term Strategic Orientations

**Our current social, political, and economic system can and should be transformed by working within and outside it to change how it functions:**

**65%**

**The system as it is can and should be uprooted and a new one built:**

**19%**

**Our current social, political, and economic system can and should be substantially reformed by working within existing structures:**

**9%**

The predominant orientation of the field toward systems transformation is, by definition, long-term work. Achieving it requires sustained strategy, disciplined organizing, and a clear understanding of how power is built over time. For many, that strategy centers on building power through base-building and agitational campaigns. "If we don't have these long-term, multi-decade strategic plans about how we're going to build power in the long term, we will not build any power," one organizer noted. Yet even with this alignment in vision, there are notable gaps in practice. As a field, most organizations' strategic timelines remain relatively short.

The majority of organizations plan no further than five years into the future, and only a small fraction are developing strategies that extend a decade or more. This suggests a challenge not only in planning horizons, but in the field's ability to map the scale and duration of power-building required to achieve transformational goals.

Organizers identified several obstacles to developing a long-term strategy. One is an overemphasis on rapid response. "A lot of young people being activated, they're like, 'Oh, we need to fight that, or that.' And it can be both really critical politicizing moments and also ambulance chasing, in a way that can undermine having a long-term strategy," one organization told us. This dynamic can lead to what they described as a "defensive stance," pulling organizations' attention away from their core work.

Youth-only organizations face particular challenges due to young people cycling out of organizations. "It's also hard to have a long-term strategy when you

have short tenures," one organizer said. "Then it feels like staff end up holding vision more than you would want them to because that's where you have longevity."

Organizations who have clarified their long-term strategy report that it has helped them identify gaps in their power-building work, including their base-building practices. As one organizer explained, "I think the way that we do our base-building has shifted, and that's been informed by our long-term strategy. We had to reevaluate, like, 'Okay, some of the things that we're doing are just not going to get us to where we want to be.'"

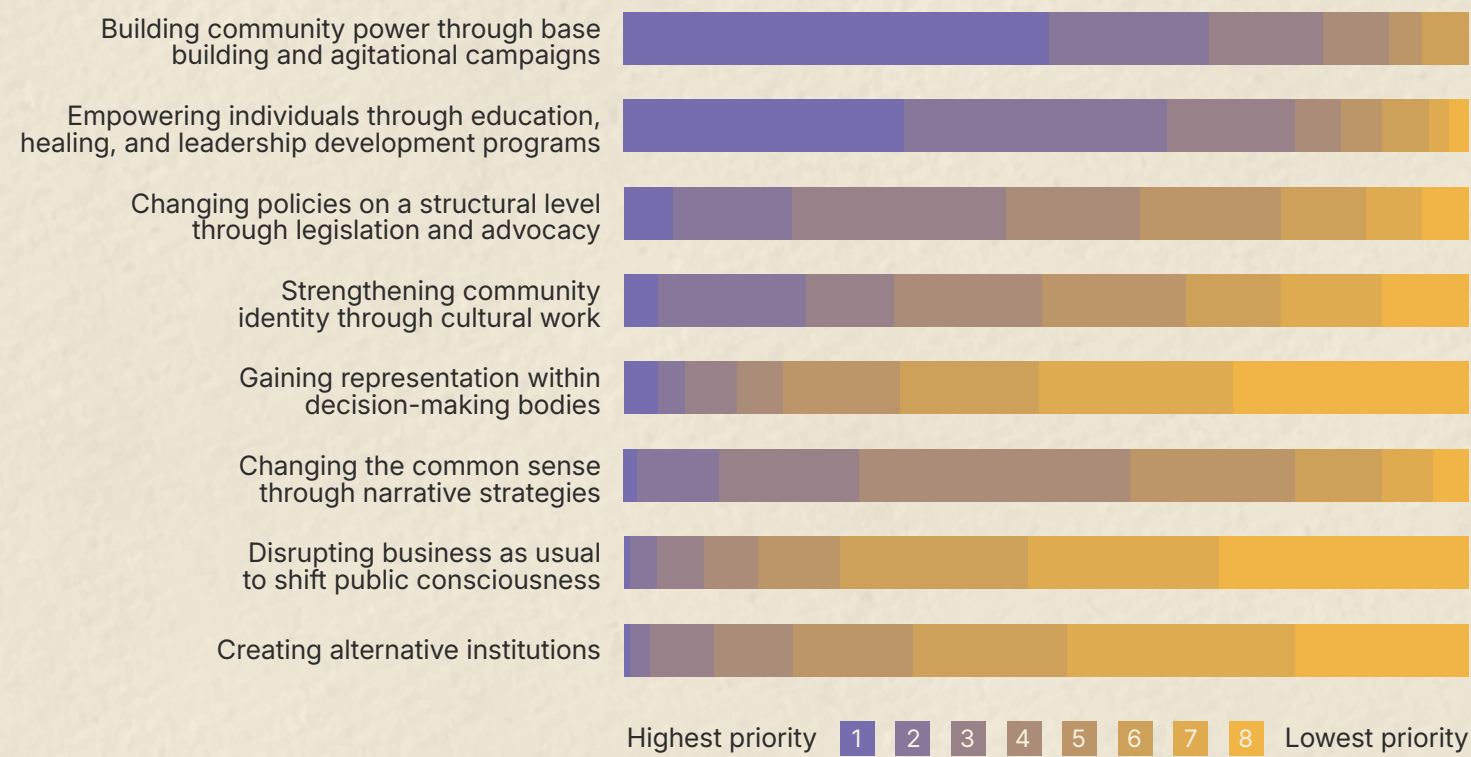


# YOUTH ORGANIZING ENGAGES MULTIPLE LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

Lasting social change requires organizations to operate across multiple strategies. However, transformative change depends on whether those strategies are anchored in building power through organized bases and sustained campaigns.

In the 2025 Field Scan, over two-thirds of organizations reported that building community power through base-building and agitational campaigns is either their first or second priority.

## Top Priorities in Organizational Strategies



While there is clear emphasis on base-building and campaigns, the survey reflects the field’s use of a broad mix of strategies. In addition to rapid-response mobilizations, a significant portion of organizations also prioritize empowering young people through education, healing, and leadership development, with 65% reporting it as their first or second priority in terms of long-term strategies.

This emphasis on individual development reflects both the historical roots of the field and more recent trends. However, organizers raised concerns that these approaches can, at times, become disconnected from power-building. One organizer described this shift

as a turn inward: “There’s a lot of focus in organizing inward,” they said, particularly following the racial justice uprisings in 2020. “You’re just organizing inward for your organization to do something or say something, and now you’re not organizing in the community.”

As noted in Snapshot 2, the field continues to grapple with the relationship between individual development and collective power. This tension highlights a central challenge: ensuring that all strategies, including education, healing, and leadership development, are aligned with the broader goal of building collective power, rather than operating as ends in themselves.

# USING A POWER ANALYSIS HELPS YOUTH ORGANIZERS AVOID THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE

Across the field, youth organizing groups report wide variation in membership size, ranging from just a handful of members to tens of thousands.

In the 2025 Field Scan, the average organization maintains a median of 90 members. By geographic scope, national and statewide organizations also report larger median membership bases — 164 and 86 members, respectively — compared to 65 for local organizations. Organizational model also appears to influence membership size: while intergenerational models report a median of 95 members, youth-led organizations report a median of 65 members and youth-led programs within adult organizations, 50 members.

Several organizations described how a return to a long-term strategy (versus, for example, a focus on turning youth out to actions) led them to reassess their base-building practices. In “Y’all Tryna Win or Nah,” Philadelphia’s Youth United for Change reflected

While figures provide useful context for organizational capacity, membership size alone is not a reliable measure of power. A key principle of base-building is having a power analysis that enables an organization to accurately identify the specific type of leverage needed to shift the balance of power.

## Average Membership by Geographic Focus:

| Local:    | Statewide: | National:  |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| <b>65</b> | <b>86</b>  | <b>164</b> |
| members   | members    | members    |

## Average Membership by Organizational Model:

| Youth-led: | Intergenerational: | Youth-Led Program Within Adult Organization: |
|------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>65</b>  | <b>95</b>          | <b>50</b>                                    |
| members    | members            | members                                      |

on how they shifted away from prioritizing scale for visibility and toward building a more intentional and engaged base: Their membership base became smaller, but ultimately more impactful: “We were less concerned with performing for the cameras, simply trying to be seen for grant purposes. We wanted to build something useful not only for students, but our neighborhood. That meant building the capacity of students and the organization with intention and precision.”

Similarly, one organizer shared, “We’d rather have 10 really strong deep relationships than a hundred less deep relationships. So I’m really investing in these one-on-ones with folks and trying to build that way, as opposed to having a bunch of cold one-on-ones with strangers.” A strong foundation of people, identified through a power analysis, becomes the building block for pulling the lever of power outlined in the analysis,

whereas many more disparately spread and shallowly engaged members does not allow for an organization to actualize member power.

Another organization described how a power analysis led them to shift away from practices that constrained their ability to cultivate strong youth leadership in service of building power. "If you are a place to have fun, a place to make friends, a place to get paid, you're attracting people who kind of just want to chill," an organizer reflected. In response, they phased out stipends and refocused on strengthening a politically-oriented onboarding and member-to-member organizing.

These examples underscore a broader point: base-building is not about pursuing the easiest or most obvious path to growth. It is about making disciplined choices that build the kind of base capable of exercising power over time.



# RECRUITMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS:



## THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF BUILDING A POWERFUL BASE

While methods vary according to context, the heart of base-building is cultivating intentional relationships.

A core fundamental of base-building is engaging in regular, intentional activities that grow an organization's membership in alignment with its long-term strategy. Recruitment is not simply about increasing numbers — it is about bringing people into a process of organizing that builds their capacity to act collectively.

As one organizer described their approach, "For us, it looks like leaders holding one-to-ones to identify potential members within their universes, member-leaders holding a turf of members, and then everybody being involved in outreach and in base-building. And thinking about base-building not as recruitment to the program, but bringing people into organizing."

Across the field, however, organizations are grappling with significant challenges in carrying out this work consistently and at scale. In focus groups for the 2025 Field Scan, organizers pointed to recent shifts in organizing practice that have made core base-building tactics more difficult to sustain.

Several organizers shared that members and leaders have become more hesitant to engage in in-person outreach such as door-knocking and phonebanking, instead preferring digital methods. As one organizer summarized the sentiment they are hearing from young people: "Organizing shouldn't be out at the doors. It should just be online."

Recruitment is not simply about increasing numbers — it is about bringing people into a process of organizing that builds their capacity to act collectively.



While digital tools play an important role in outreach, organizers were clear that they cannot replace the relational work at the heart of base-building. "There's more resistance and hesitation to canvassing, to door-knocking, to cold-calling people, to approaching people to talk about the campaign or talk about the organizing work. People are not doing it," one organizer shared. "Or it takes a lot of coaching, handholding, and preparation to get to be like, let's just go canvass at the courthouse and talk to people about why they're there and what happened to them." Another put it more directly: "Kids are terrified to talk in front of people, to talk to other people."

Some organizations report declining base strength due to these shifts. "Our base has decreased," one organizer noted, adding that recent wins have come "through very effective partnerships and coalition building, and not particularly because of mass-based power."



# RECRUITMENT METHODS REFLECT ORGANIZATIONAL CONDITIONS

Organizations recruit members through a wide range of tactics, including canvassing and door-knocking, public-facing events such as tabling and town halls, arts and culture programming, service delivery such as social services, mutual aid, and drop-in hours, and digital outreach via social media and email newsletters.

These strategies are shaped by organizational context. For youth organizing groups, recruitment often centers on schools and youth-specific spaces. At the same time, broader external conditions — particularly the COVID-19 pandemic — have significantly reshaped recruitment practices across the field.

During the pandemic, many organizations shifted toward digital organizing and, in some cases, toward meeting members’ immediate material needs. These shifts had lasting effects. Some organizations lost membership and have struggled to rebuild in-person organizing practices, while others continue to rely heavily on digital outreach. As one organizer reflected,

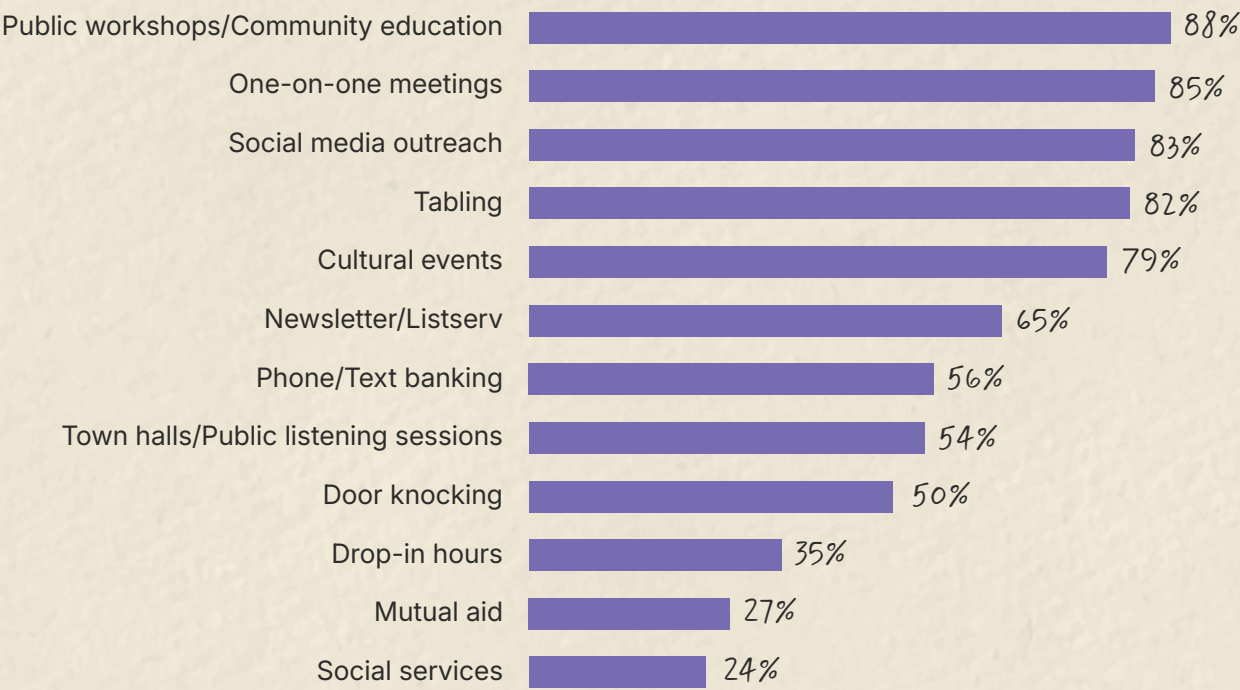
the pandemic has “made us very behind on just the basics of organizing, and the basics of base-building.”

In the 2025 Field Scan, the most common recruitment methods reported by organizations are public workshops and community education, one-on-one meetings, social media outreach, and tabling, all of which are used by roughly 80% or more of surveyed organizations.

Online outreach, including newsletters and listservs, remains widespread, reflecting long-term shifts toward digital engagement and the more recent impacts of the pandemic.

At the same time, a notable share of organizations report using service-based approaches as recruitment strategies, including mutual aid (27%) and social services (24%). These approaches raise important strategic questions about how service provision connects to long-term power-building — a tension explored further below.

## Base-Building Methods Utilized by Organizations



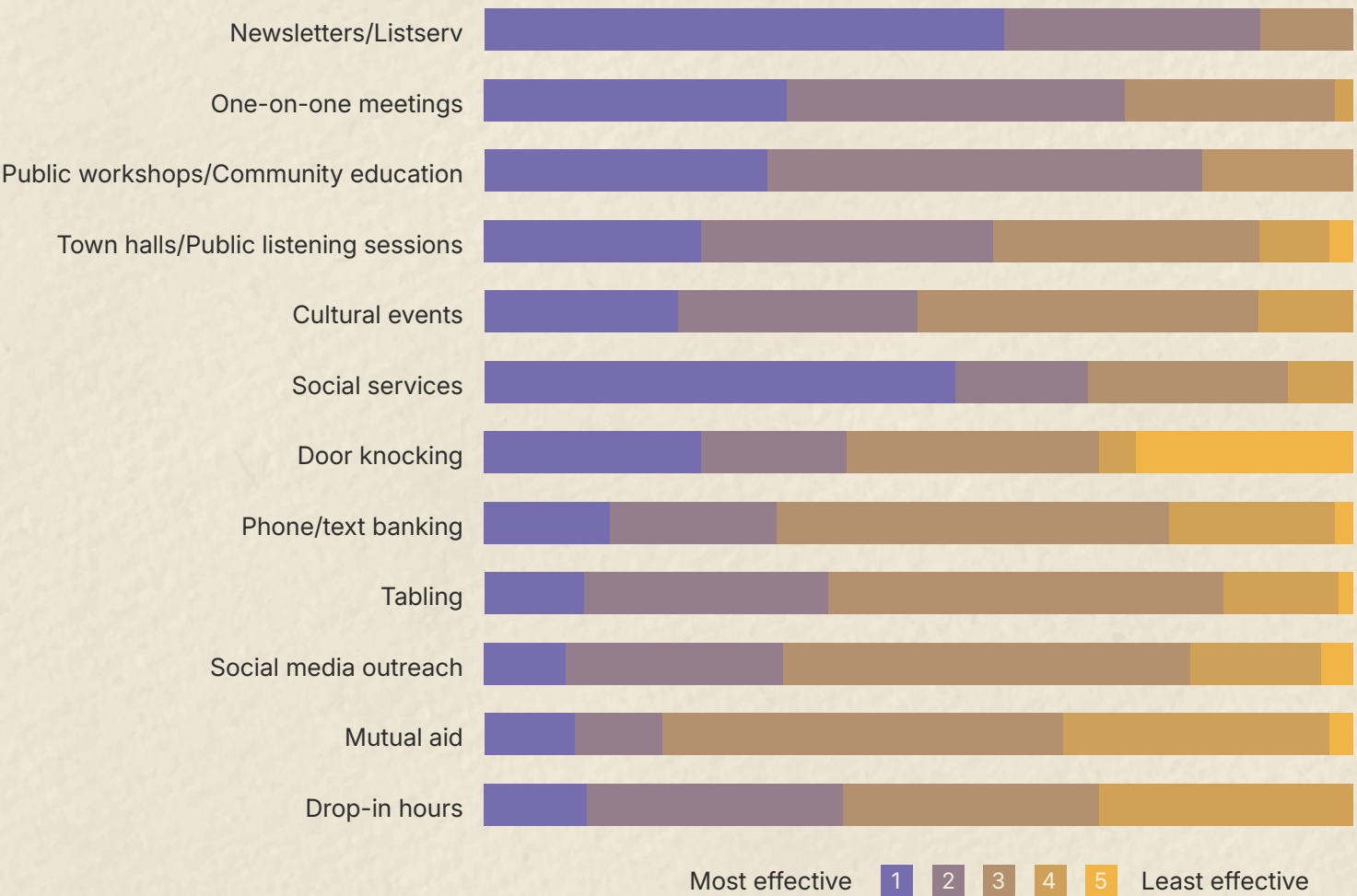
# MEMBER RECRUITMENT IS ABOUT CULTIVATING AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Recruitment methods do not operate in isolation. Effective base-building requires moving people through a series of interactions, from initial contact to deeper engagement. For example, organizations may first meet potential members through tabling or social media, and then build stronger relationships through one-on-one meetings, workshops, or ongoing participation in campaigns. To better understand this process, the 2025 Field Scan examined both the frequency and effectiveness of different recruitment methods.

Organizations reported that the most frequently used outreach methods are social media outreach, newsletters / listservs, social services, door knocking, and mutual aid. Notably, these activities tend to either require relatively limited staff capacity (social media outreach), serve dual purposes within broader organizational programming (social services and mutual aid), or reflect the presence of election-cycle / civic engagement resources (door knocking).

| Activities                           | Once a year | 2-5 times a year | 6-12 times a year | 12+ times a year |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Public workshops/community education | 2%          | 18%              | 36%               | 44%              |
| Newsletter/Listserv                  | 1%          | 7%               | 13%               | 79%              |
| Social media outreach                | 0%          | 5%               | 11%               | 84%              |
| Tabling                              | 2%          | 20%              | 28%               | 50%              |
| One-on-one meetings                  | 7%          | 53%              | 21%               | 18%              |
| Mutual aid                           | 1%          | 21%              | 21%               | 58%              |
| Phone/text banking                   | 1%          | 16%              | 24%               | 55%              |
| Town halls/Public listening sessions | 12%         | 38%              | 28%               | 22%              |
| Cultural events                      | 10%         | 32%              | 13%               | 42%              |
| Door knocking                        | 2%          | 20%              | 17%               | 61%              |
| Drop-in hours                        | 7%          | 43%              | 20%               | 23%              |
| Social services                      | 0%          | 7%               | 21%               | 72%              |

# Perceived Effectiveness of Base-Building Activities



However, frequency alone does not determine impact, raising the question of how effective these methods are in actually building a base. When asked to assess effectiveness — defined as how well methods bring people into an organization’s base — organizations identified the following activities as most effective:

- Newsletter/listserv outreach
- One-on-one meetings
- Public workshops and community education events

Town halls and public listening sessions Taken together, these findings highlight clear patterns. While broad, lower-touch methods are widely used, the approaches organizations identify as most effective tend to involve deeper, more relational forms of engagement — particularly one-on-one meetings and in-person engagement.

At the same time, a gap emerges between what works and what is practiced consistently. More than half of organizations report holding one-on-ones only two to five times per year, and fewer than 20% conduct them more than once a month, despite their recognized effectiveness. In contrast, methods such as social media outreach and mutual aid are used frequently, but are less often identified as effective on their own in bringing people into a base.

This misalignment points to a broader dynamic. In practice, outreach activities are often less shaped by long-term base-building goals and more by immediate organizational conditions — including limited staff capacity, existing program structures, and funder priorities — which can make it more difficult to consistently implement the relational practices required to build a durable base.

# THE ROLE OF DIRECT SERVICES AND MUTUAL AID IN BASE-BUILDING

As noted earlier, the role of direct services in organizing has long been a point of discussion in the youth and intergenerational organizing field. In recent years, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises, mutual aid has also emerged as a more prominent strategy for building an organization's membership.

In the 2025 Field Scan, 78% of organizations reported providing some form of support services or mutual aid. The most common offerings include healing and wellness practices and mentorship programs, followed by career guidance, college preparation, housing, food aid, and immigration-related support. Asked about the purpose of support services, many organizations reported they use them as a means to support members in their work as organizers (68%) or to recruit people from their constituency into their base (54%). In this way, it is clear that support services can play a critical role in facilitating their power-building work.

At the same time, organizers identified significant challenges that arise from an overemphasis on these approaches. Nearly half of organizations (46%) report using support services as a means to meet the basic or immediate needs of their community, and another 46% report that meeting members' basic or immediate needs is a core function of their organization. As service provision generally requires dedicated organizational capacity and resources, this focus can run the risk of contradicting an organization's ability to focus on power-building.

As one organizer noted, "We've been incorporating a food bank or resources like talking to an immigration lawyer. That's also where it can easily slide away from organizing. We don't want to be too focused on

the service aspect and have people lose sight of, 'I'm organizing because of the movement' [and instead trend towards] 'because I'm focusing on my needs right now.'" Another organizer shared that while their organization provides services to more than 500 students, "they're not activated in our base," noting that this work "could and should be through the lens of organizing."

These dynamics are reflected in staff time allocation: direct services account for 10% of organizing staff's time.

Some organizations have sought to address this tension by shifting toward mutual aid models, which are often grounded in a more explicit political framework and aim to strengthen relationships, recruit members, and contribute to long-term power-building. Still, mutual aid presents its own challenges, including questions of scale, capacity, and the extent to which organizations are filling gaps left by public systems. Nearly 60% of organizations that conduct mutual aid activities report doing so on a monthly basis, despite that the great majority rank mutual aid as a less effective strategy for building their base. As one organizer reflected, while mutual aid "felt really good," their organization ultimately chose to refocus on core organizing practices: "instead of engaging in a mutual aid project, we're actually going to spend that time developing our member model or member ladder and how we talk about organizing, so that as an organization, we can be strong."

Across the field, there is no single approach. Instead, organizations are actively assessing how and whether service provision and mutual aid contribute to their broader strategy for building power.

# STRATEGIC CLARITY IS THE KEY TO TURNING MASS MOBILIZATION INTO MASS PARTICIPATION

In the wake of mass mobilizations over the past decade, many organizers are grappling with how to convert moments of heightened political engagement into sustained membership and power. These moments activate large numbers of young people and shape political identity. As one organizer put it, "Our task is to convert that to organizing."

Yet across the field, mobilization is often conflated with organizing. "For the past 10 years or so, our sector has spent a lot of time on outward-facing mobilizations and getting folks out in the street as a prominent primary tactic," one organizer said. "And we've kind of lost the basics of building relationships, on what it's going to take to move a decision-maker to get us what we want, and how we build organizations and show people a sense of their own power."

While protest moments create significant opportunities for recruitment, organizations often lack the systems and rigor to capture and sustain that engagement. One organizer reflected on a missed opportunity: "I'm thinking like, damn, if our base-building trainings were stronger, if we were more consistent with our base-building, we could have used that moment as an opportunity to say, 'Hey, oh, you came here because of this? How many more young people do you know?... go through this training and then go out and bring some more folks.' But we didn't do that."

The implication is clear: turning energy into power requires more than presence in key moments. It requires disciplined systems of recruitment, training, and engagement that can absorb and develop new members over time.



"For the past 10 years or so, our sector has spent a lot of time on outward-facing mobilizations and getting folks out in the street as a prominent primary tactic."

# THE ROLE OF STAFF ORGANIZERS IN BUILDING MEMBER POWER

If members are the engine of organizations, then organizing staff are the fuel.



If members are the source of an organization's power, staff organizers play a critical — but specific — role in building and sustaining that power. Their responsibility is not to act in place of the base, but to facilitate its growth: identifying, recruiting, training, and developing members into leaders who can themselves organize others.

This requires a particular orientation toward organizing, in which staff organizers prioritize deep and ongoing engagement with members and the communities they are organizing, ensuring that their time and energy are directed toward building relationships, developing leaders, and expanding the base.

Across the field, however, organizers noted a persistent challenge: staff time is often pulled in multiple directions, including internal meetings, external coordination, fundraising, and administrative responsibilities. When these demands outweigh time spent engaging with members, it can weaken the organization's connection to its base and limit its ability to grow.

Re-centering the role of staff organizers around base-building requires clear expectations, accountability structures, and alignment with leadership development practices. Organizations that have made this shift report stronger relationships with members, clearer pathways for leadership, and greater overall capacity to build power.

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# STAFF TIME IS NOT ALWAYS ALIGNED WITH BASE-BUILDING

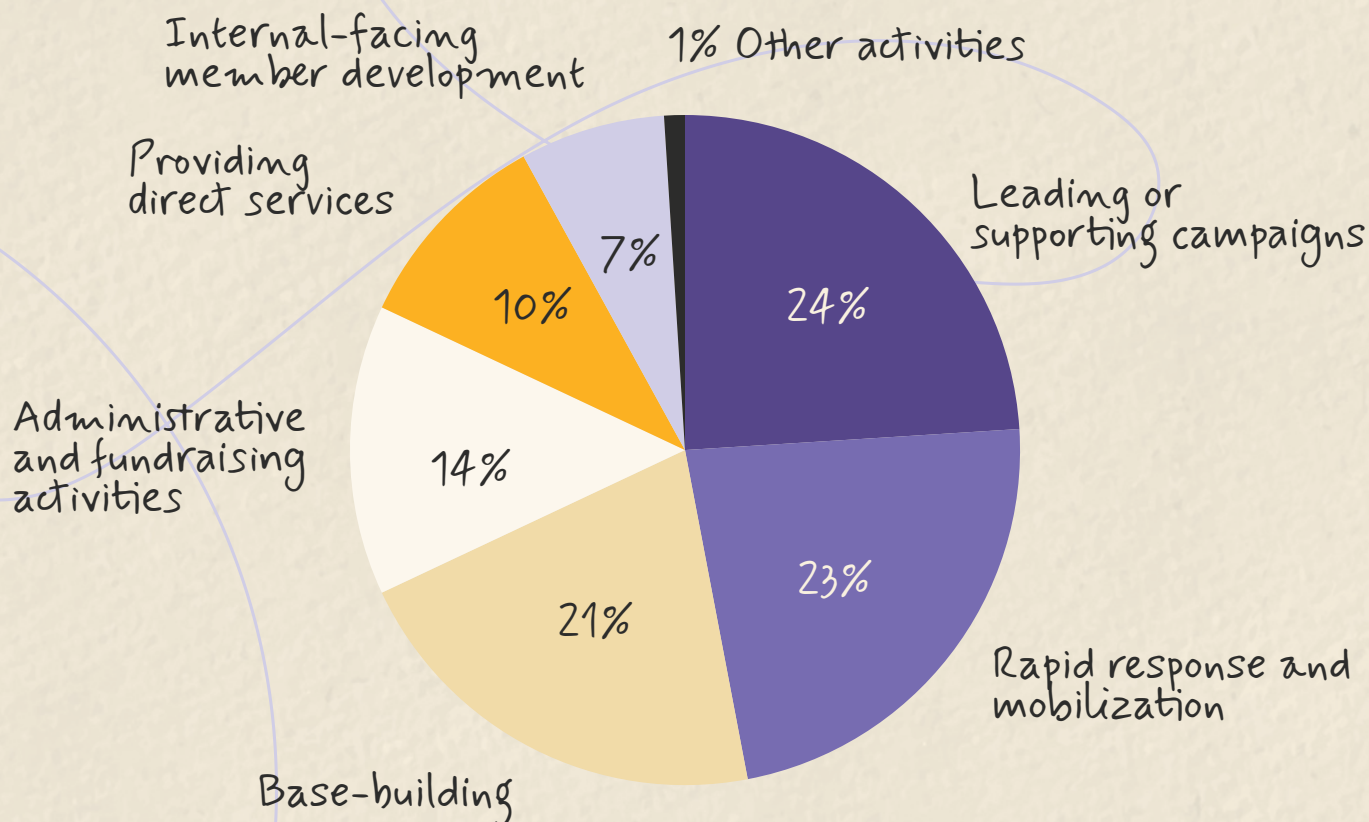
In Snapshot 2, we highlighted the exciting capacity increases occurring across the field as organizations staff up: 73% percent of all organizations have at least five staff members (full-time and part-time), and 64% reported at least five full-time staff, with a median of 13 total staff across organizations. We also asked how many staff are devoted to organizing, and 75% of organizations shared they have at least one full-time staff member who is devoted primarily to organizing, with a median of eight staff (full-time and part-time) devoted to organizing work.

This level of staffing reflects substantial potential capacity for base-building. However, how staff time is allocated reveals important tensions in practice.

On average, base-building accounts for 21% of organizing staff's time. By comparison, staff spend 24% of their time on campaigns and another 24% on rapid response and mobilization, while administrative and fundraising responsibilities account for 14%. These allocations suggest that while base-building is recognized as a core function, it competes with a range of other priorities — some of which may pull staff away from sustained engagement with members and the base.

## Average Allocation of Staff Time Across Activities

*What is the average amount of staff members' time spent across different activities?*



# SETTING STANDARDS FOR STAFF

In response, many organizations are working to more clearly define expectations for staff organizers and reorient their roles toward core base-building responsibilities. One organizer shared that their organization, which historically struggled with “a lack of rigor”, has undergone a reset where staff are now expected to hold 15 one-on-ones each week — a concrete standard designed to prioritize relationship-building and member development. Another organizer reflected on a similar shift: “For a long time, there have been a lot of passes being given for folks who aren’t doing base-building or aren’t meeting regularly with their young folks in their base to develop them.” In response, their organization began setting “clear expectations” for staff organizers.

These shifts point to a broader pattern: organizations that are strengthening their base-building practices are doing so by establishing clearer structures, expectations, and accountability for staff.

Leadership development systems, as noted in Snapshot 2, are central to this work. Staff organizers are responsible not only for recruiting members, but for developing their leadership capacity and equipping them with the skills to take on increasing responsibility, including recruiting and organizing

others. Leadership ladders, in turn, should reflect this progression, ensuring that as members take on greater responsibility, they are also contributing to the growth of the base.

Organizations that have aligned staff roles with these principles report stronger coherence between their strategy and practice. Members are brought in with clearer expectations about their role in the organization and in the community. As one organizer reflected, “If you have actual ways of measuring your work, you can more accurately get to the base you want, targets you want, and the power you want.”

*“If you have actual ways of measuring your work, you can more accurately get to the base you want, targets you want, and the power you want.”*



# CLOSING THE LOOP: ALIGNING STRATEGY AND PRACTICE

Political energy is high, and participation is widespread, yet the work of converting that energy into organized, durable power remains uneven. The challenge is not a lack of engagement, but a gap between moments of action and the steady construction of a base.



In a focus group for the 2025 Field Scan, one organizer told us, “I am surprised by how woefully unprepared I feel like the youth organizing sector is for this moment.” Despite all of the mass mobilizations and uprisings in recent years, they added, “it feels like we’re almost in the same place.” Another organizer offered a diagnosis: this stagnation stems from “not having strategy and falling away from core organizing practices.”

This Snapshot reflects a field at an inflection point. Political energy is high, and participation is widespread, yet the work of converting that energy into organized, durable power remains uneven. The challenge is not a lack of engagement, but a gap between moments of action and the steady construction of a base.

Across the field, there is growing recognition of what effective base-building requires. Organizations recognize that power is rooted in a growing, organized membership base that is developed over time and driven by a long-term strategy. Many are beginning to reassess how they recruit and engage members, and structure staff roles to strengthen that base.

At the same time, key tensions persist:

- Recruitment is widespread but often lacks the depth needed to build durable relationships
- Digital outreach is common but not always paired with in-person organizing
- Service provision and mutual aid can open doors but can also divert focus
- Staff capacity exists but is not always aligned with base-building priorities

The question is not whether base-building is valued, but how consistently it is executed. Building a base is not a discrete activity — it is a discipline that has to be integrated across an organization’s strategy, structure, and daily practice. When that discipline is in place, the trajectory begins to shift: recruitment becomes relational, members take on increasing responsibility, and organizations grow not only in size but in cohesion and capacity. Moments of heightened political energy can become not the endpoints, but entryways into sustained organizing.

As one organizer put it, reflecting on missed opportunities, “if our base-building trainings were stronger, if we were more consistent with our base-building, we could have used that moment” to bring more people into the work.

There are significant opportunities ahead. Young people are entering political life shaped by overlapping crises and seeking ways to engage beyond moments of protest. The demand for organizing is present. The task is to build the infrastructure capable of meeting that demand.

Across the field, organizations that have sharpened their base-building practices offer important lessons. By aligning long-term strategy with recruitment, leadership development, and staff roles, they are building the conditions for sustained power.

Base-building is the groundwork of organizing for power, but it doesn’t stand alone. In the Snapshot 4, we turn to another core component of power-building — campaigns and strategic alliances — examining how organizations translate organized people into material wins and expanded power.

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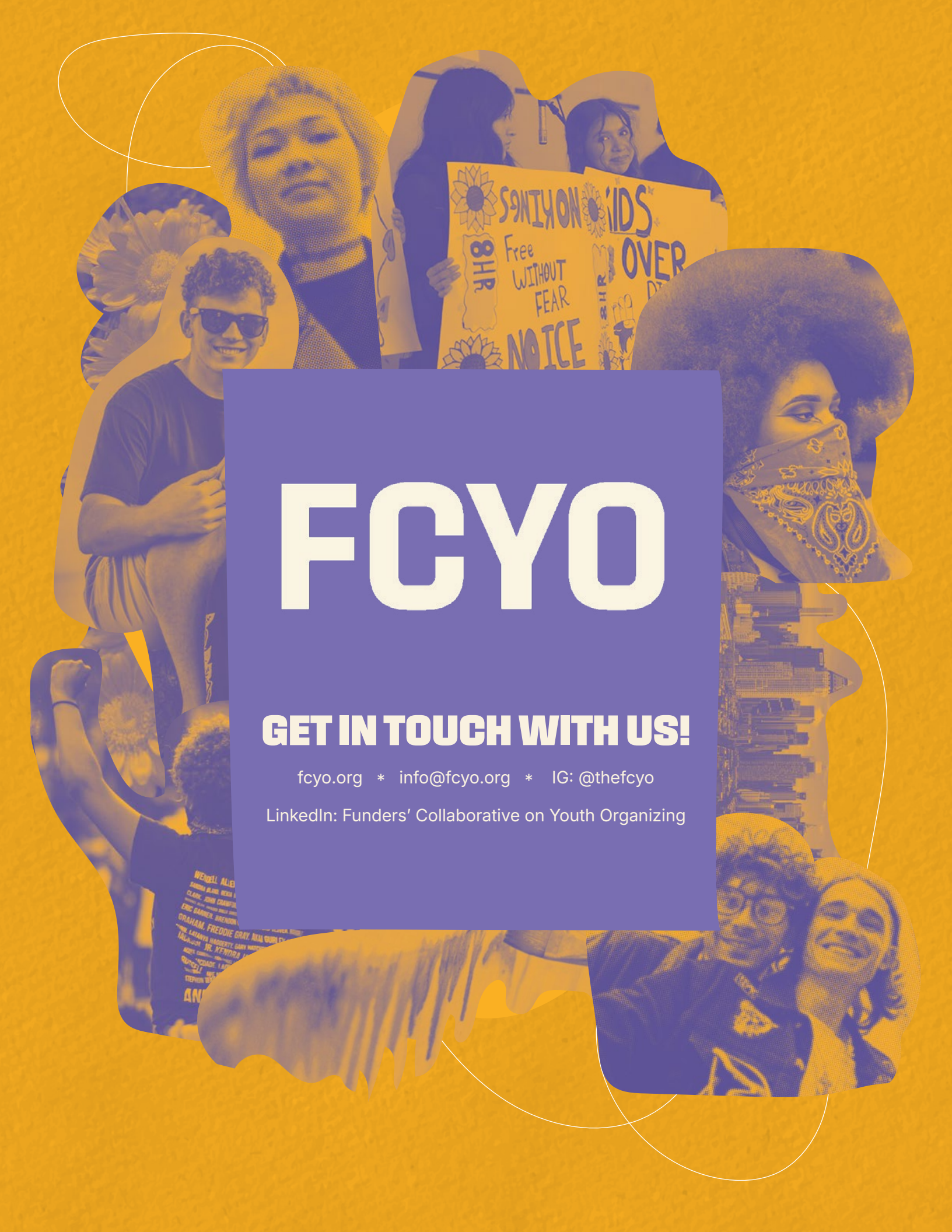
# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Data for the 2025 Snapshot Series was collected between 2024-2025 via a year-long, mixed methods scan of the youth and intergenerational organizing field, including a survey completed by 142 youth organizing groups as well as 11 focus groups with 40 youth organizing leaders. The survey was developed and administered by Research for Action (RFA). The focus group protocol was developed in partnership with FCYO and administered to organizational participants in FCYO's cohorts both virtually and in-person at FCYO's Year of Praxis convening. RFA led the initial analysis of the survey and focus group data. Over six months, the RFA team worked alongside FCYO to engage a Field Scan Advisory Team composed of organizing practitioners tasked with reviewing and providing feedback on key findings from the survey and focus group data as well as participating in a series of targeted conversations on "emergent dialogues in the field" including healing and wellness, arts and culture, and youth leadership in intergenerational organizing. In partnership with FCYO, Esther Wang rendered a final analysis on the survey and focus group data to author the Snapshot Series. Together, the Snapshot Series reports reflect a synthesis of the analyses conducted by RFA, Esther Wang, and the FCYO team.

A note on the data and comparisons with previous FCYO Field Scans: The research processes for each of FCYO's Field Scans have been methodologically

distinct and led by different research teams. Some years, as with the 2020 Field Scan, we issued an open call for responses. In the field's formative years, we began by identifying youth organizing groups and then engaged in targeted outreach. Over time, our outreach sharpened as well to focus more exclusively on organizations that prioritized organizing. Likewise, the questions we have asked in our survey have changed over time, based both on the needs of the field and evolving framing and language. As we draw comparative insights across field scans, we acknowledge that we're making the best comparisons we can with the data that we have. Still, our conclusions are reinforced by focus group data as well as observations and analysis from the FCYO team over the past two decades.

FCYO is grateful to each of our research partners in the design and execution of this project. Special thanks go to Keerthi Rajesh, Kevin Burgess, Maja Pehrson, and Sieltah Parks at Research for Action, Esther Wang, and the Field Scan Advisory Team members: Cecilia Prado, Lindsey Matson, Maya Sheppard, Omar Cardenas, and Phoebe Dolan. And, as always, our deepest thanks and appreciation to the youth organizers who dedicated their time and energy to respond to the survey and participate in our focus group conversations, as well as the countless organizers whose tireless fight for a better world provide not only the inspiration for this report but the whole of our collective work ahead.



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