



TRANSFORMING LIVES, TRANSFORMING MOVEMENT BUILDING

Lessons from the National Domestic Workers Alliance
Strategy - Organizing - Leadership (SOL) Initiative



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

USCDornsife
Program for Environmental
and Regional Equity

TRANSFORMING LIVES, TRANSFORMING MOVEMENT BUILDING: **Lessons from the National Domestic Workers Alliance** **Strategy - Organizing - Leadership (SOL) Initiative**

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ORGANIZATIONAL DESCRIPTIONS

USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity

Established in 2007, USC  Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) conducts research and facilitates discussions on issues of environmental justice, regional inclusion, and social movement building. PERE conducts high-quality research in our focus areas that is relevant to public policy concerns and that reaches to those directly affected communities that most need to be engaged in the discussion. In general, we seek and support direct collaborations with community-based organizations in research and other activities, trying to forge a new model of how university and community can work together for the common good. PERE has developed an arc of research looking at today's social movements in a way that combines academic and on-the-ground theories and knowledge.

National Domestic Workers Alliance

Founded in 2007, the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) works for the respect, recognition, and inclusion in labor protections for domestic workers. The national alliance is powered by 44 affiliate organizations—plus our first local chapter in Atlanta—of over 10,000 nannies, housekeepers, and caregivers for the elderly in 26 cities and 18 states. NDWA is winning improved working conditions while building a powerful movement rooted in the human rights and dignity of domestic workers, immigrants, women, and their families by: working with a broad range of groups and individuals to change how we value care, women, families, and our communities; developing women of color leaders and investing in grassroots organizations to realize their potential; and building powerful state, regional, and national campaigns for concrete change.



generative somatics

generative somatics (gs) works with individuals, organizations and alliances to bring a pragmatic and practice-able transformative methodology to movements for systemic change. The somatic methodology is over 40 years old and has been brought specifically into movement settings with a political focus over the last 10 years. gs forwards the interdependence of personal, community, and social transformation, and brings a trauma and healing analysis to strengthen movement strategy and work. gs integrates transformative approaches with organizing and movement building by working closely with various movement partners including Social Justice Leadership, NDWA, Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity, Racial Justice Action Center, Ashland Youth Center, and more.



Social Justice Leadership

Social Justice Leadership (SJL) trained grassroots organizations and leaders using a transformative organizing approach for a decade. SJL started with a series of Leadership Semesters to explore the effect of personal development and political education as a way to increase organizational capacity and effectiveness. This led to an intensive program for new organizers and grew to include year-long programs in multiple cities supporting individuals, organizations, alliances, and movement-building efforts. In Spring 2013, SJL closed; however, its efforts continue through projects like the Economic Justice Alliance of Michigan, a worker benefit alliance; Racial Justice Action Center, a multi-racial organizing and training center in Georgia; and Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity, which supports the rebuilding of Black organizing infrastructure through training and networking. Former SJL staff members continue to work with NDWA on the SOL program.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Transformations and Co-Creation

DOMESTIC WORKER ORGANIZING TODAY

Today's millions of domestic workers in the U.S. play a critical role in our society. Whether caring for our children, providing home health care for our elderly, or keeping our homes clean for our families, they "make all other work possible," in the words of Ai-jen Poo, Director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA). And with the demographic growth of the elderly and disabled, domestic workers will only become more essential to our society.

Yet, despite the importance and intimacy of their work to those who hire them, domestic workers have been largely invisible to society, undervalued in the labor market, and excluded from basic workplace standards and protections. But all that is starting to change.

In July 2010, the New York State Legislature passed the first ever Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights legally recognizing domestic workers. In June 2011, the International Labour Organization adopted the First Convention for Decent Work for Domestic Workers aimed at improving conditions for tens of millions of domestic workers worldwide. In July 2013, Hawaii became the second state to pass the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. In September 2013, the California governor signed the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights approving overtime pay. Also in September 2013, the new Department of Labor regulations extending minimum wage and overtime protections for the almost 2 million home care workers were passed. In June 2014, Massachusetts became the fourth state in four years to pass a Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights.

These victories are no coincidence. Behind each of these victories is a group of domestic workers who are organizing to win respect, recognition, and inclusion in labor protections and who are networked nationally through the National Domestic Workers Alliance.

Established in 2007, NDWA was founded by 13 organizations as a way to scale up the power and influence of locally-organized domestic workers for state, national, and international impact. The Alliance has since grown to 44 affiliate organizations across 18 states. It has launched several national campaigns, including We Belong Together, Beyond Survival, and Caring Across Generations, which has grown to over 200 coalitional partners dedicated to transforming the care system and encouraging our society to value the contribution of our elderly,



people with disabilities, and the workers who care for them.

DEVELOPING NEW LEADERSHIP

In order to seize the opportunities created by these policy victories and strategic partnerships, NDWA recognized a need to train grassroots leadership more quickly than before. And not only new and more leadership was needed but a different kind of leadership. The political moment called for leaders who could inspire workers, weigh in strategically on policy campaigns, and represent domestic worker interests in multi-issue, multi-constituency coalitions. And the movement moment called for leaders who could usher in a new culture of organizing that could re-envision, reinvigorate, and refresh the domestic worker organizing sector for the long-term movements for social justice.

Too often the prevailing culture of organizing seeks social transformation at the expense of personal well-being and sustainability, especially of organizers and leaders. In response, in 2011 NDWA launched a two-year, transformative leadership and organizing training, Strategy - Organizing - Leadership (SOL) Initiative, in collaboration with trainers from Social Justice Leadership (S JL) and generative somatics (gs). The primary training format was a series of five, four-day, intensive retreats. Both domestic worker-leaders and organizers from established and emerging organizations from across the country were invited to apply for the program. In the end, a cohort of about 60 (almost all) women participated.

The overall goal of SOL was to provide participants with the transformative leadership capacities and organizing skills to push the scale and power of local and national domestic worker organizing in a way that would be grounded in vision, strategy, healthy and generative relationship building, and sustainability. It sought to link the leadership skills and competencies to social and personal transformation. And it was not only about change at the societal and individual levels but at the family, community, and institutional levels as well.

In the planning of SOL, the three organizational partners shared questions about both the theory and practice of transformational change: Is it possible to address deep, personal transformation in a way that strengthens their commitment, resilience, and skills to build and sustain powerful grassroots organizations? Is it possible to take a cohort of domestic workers and organizers through a two-year process and change how they show up in their own lives, in their organizations, and in the Alliance?

Recognizing that SOL represented an important learning opportunity

"SOL has helped me feel stronger and more secure in my leadership...The learning is practical and hands-on...We are coming away not only with concrete tools to use in our organizing work (spreadsheets, documents etc.) but also with a very specific set of personal and interpersonal tools (somatic work, interpersonal skills and relationships) that will help us over the long term."

—Year 1 report and renewal application

and one worth documenting for the field, NDWA commissioned USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) to play an evaluative role at the retreats. Our purpose was less about evaluating the programmatic aspects of SOL and more about capturing transformational changes among the participants and the cohort that are likely to result in much greater shifts in the domestic workers' movement in five, ten, and twenty years from now.

ROADMAP TO THE REPORT

We begin the report by describing the SOL program—its design and the participants—and the key questions posed for this assessment. We then define the core concepts and framework that underlie the curriculum. The second half of the report is devoted to lifting up a new set of metrics for capturing indicators of transformational leadership. Based on the findings, we discuss valuable lessons for the program and conclude with implications for movement building.

This analysis is based on a review of the literature on domestic worker organizing and on intersectionality; on quantitative and qualitative data we collected through surveys, small group discussions, interviews, and observations; and on documents related to SOL provided by NDWA. Using a mixed-method approach, we coded all the data and culled the results for common themes.

Perhaps more important to note, the analysis in this report is the result of an iterative, co-creative process between PERE, NDWA, SJL, and gs - the sort of process we have called for when recommending a new model of assessment. We thus offer this report as a collective effort in a learning process about a dynamic and evolving model of transformative leadership development, transformative organizing, and transformative movement building.

AN APPROACH TO TRANSFORMATION

First, at the core of SOL was a theory of the Process of Transformation and the interdependence and interconnectedness of change on the individual, organizational, community, movement, and society levels. And the process of change at all levels was about overcoming the old and becoming the new; noticing automatic reactions and moving towards intention.

For domestic workers, in general, that meant shedding tendencies towards appeasement and smoothing over conflict while shaping the “fight” within that make them such a powerful base for change. For the trainers that meant recognizing and addressing the unconscious habits (developed in the survival of difficult social and work conditions) that



are counter-productive in the fight and vision for labor rights and social justice.

Secondly, SOL offered a tailored set of Practices to overcome those unconscious habits and to build new skills, new tendencies, and new “muscle memory” that lead to more choices and possibilities for change. This is based on a belief that people have developed responses to traumatic experiences that, again, are not always helpful in the fight for justice. Through a politicized somatics methodology, SOL supported the process of transformation by increasing self-awareness and supporting people in the move towards embodying new ways of being and acting that align with vision and values.

Practices, such as centering and Jo Kata (a practice with a wooden staff from a traditional Japanese martial art), helped build skills to be centered in the midst of conflict, focused on being present, open and connected to self and others, and grounded in one’s commitment and vision. Over time, the facilitators noticed a greater capacity among the cohort to handle conflict in productive ways rather than avoiding the situation, defaulting to appeasing each other, or holding resentments.

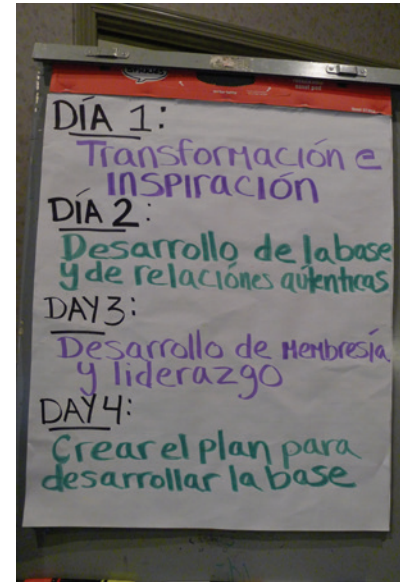
Thirdly, Power building was a core component of SOL. NDWA’s core strategies are building a base of domestic workers, moving them to take action through strategic campaigns, and building a powerful movement for social and economic justice. Therefore, SOL was designed to develop an orientation towards assessing, building, and leveraging power.

The retreats provided a space to develop real-world, real-time campaign strategies from state-level Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights campaigns to Comprehensive Immigration Reform. Strategic discussions, paired with somatic practices, opened up a transformative space for people to approach difficult decisions, such as compromising organizational goals in the interest of the entire coalition, with a stronger orientation around NDWA’s long-term, power-building goals.

INDICATORS OF TRANSFORMATION

The success of leadership development programs is usually measured by the number of leaders who attend a training or retreat. Or how many new members they bring into the organization. Or how many give public testimony in support of a piece of legislation.

What we lift up in this report are those less frequently captured but observable measures of transformation among the participants and the cohort as a whole. And we focus on the changes that are in service to the longer term goals of ushering in a new culture and approach to organizing, campaigns, alliance building, and movement building.



The first set of metrics is captured under the term **“Centered in Commitment.”** Participants walked away with a greater commitment to purpose and vision and acquired methods for staying focused on that commitment under difficult circumstances. People reported that modeling how to be centered amidst constant change, tensions, and conflicts in organizing helped their organizations and also helped other people learn how to be centered. And that carried over to the Alliance culture as well.

A second set of metrics falls under **“Clarity in Assessment and Action,”** which reflects NDWA’s notion that a transformative approach to organizing requires attention to and skills in managing complex and dynamic situations at all levels—self, community, and societal. This metric is related to conflict, captures the skills and abilities in assessing conditions, developing campaign strategies, and making strategic choices and decisions. It taught participants how to assess, strategize, and make choices from a personal and collective state of being centered in commitment to purpose, process of transformation, and building power.

A third set of metrics involves **“Healing from Trauma.”** Facilitators intentionally planned a session on this topic for the second year of the initiative when they anticipated better collective readiness to deal with trauma and the impact of oppression. For the most part, the shared healing experience in Retreat #4 contributed to greater personal and collective resilience, dignity for oneself and others, and trust and connections with oneself and others—and was truly the transformative turning point of SOL.

The fourth metric recognizes that SOL was grounded in **“Interconnectedness and Interdependence.”** This involved the core tenet of interdependence, a notion that the success, dignity, and survival of one (individual, community, or society) are linked to the success, dignity, and survival of all. It also meant working at the intersections and interdependence of issues and identities and developing individuals’ and the group’s ability to hold multiple perspectives and differences respectfully.

One of the greatest indicators of transformation was the readiness among the cohort to move forward together around immigration reform. There is a historical fragmentation within the immigrant rights movement from the last few attempts of organizing for immigration reform during a time of increased immigrant criminalization and repression. In Retreat #5, the groups had aligned on the assessment that there was an opportunity for immigration reform and that it was time to move forward together - reflecting a bolder vision, and the ability to extend and build trust among groups despite their experiences in past

“This [training on trauma] is exactly what we need. We need to heal trauma, to be open to other women coming with trauma, to help them heal and to have more security and more connection to the community. It makes us better organizers with respect and dignity.”

—Participant, Retreat #4

campaigns.

A fifth category of **“Caring for Self and Others”** is an important one. For care workers to be told and taught to care for oneself within the context of fighting for justice for all was truly transformative. “Caring for Self and others” captures indicators that range from realizing that having personal boundaries is consistent with social justice values of care, love, and dignity to realizing that gaining a deeper connection with themselves allowed them to gain deeper connections with others. For many women, SOL helped to transform relationships with children, parents, and husbands/partners in a way that made them more available, both emotionally and physically, to the work of organizing and developing their own and other people’s leadership.

Lastly, **“Resilience in the Midst of Change and Conflict”** captures many of the changes we observed as a result of SOL teaching and modeling ways to act under pressure and how not to shy away from conflict or move too quickly to appeasement. Participants gained a new way of looking at conflict and navigating contradictions and seeing it as an opening to generate change, while keeping dignity intact in the process and coming out as a more powerful collective force. Many organizations concluded SOL with more openness to working through challenges with other organizations rather than simply walking away, ignoring, or being destructive or polarizing—a capacity that will pay off in the long-term. Given the need to build collective power to succeed, these capacities are essential.

Transformation is not a haphazard process rather it is deliberate and intentional. SOL, as an experiment, demonstrated that there is a systematic way to teach and lead a cohort through a transformative process that increases the competence and relationships in a group toward contributing to a stronger, more strategic, more resilient social justice movement.

LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

First, SOL catered to the constituency. SOL was targeted and tailored to the grassroots leadership (and organizers) who all identify with and participate in a national alliance. At the most basic level, this meant investing in supports such as interpretation, child care, and stipends for domestic workers to be able to participate fully. At a deeper level, it meant an opportunity to explore in-depth the specific conditioned tendencies of domestic workers and tailoring the curriculum accordingly.

Second, SOL was aligned with action. Putting skills and plans into action—through waging state Bill of Rights campaigns and organizing care congresses as part of the national Caring Across Generations



campaign—was a powerful means to reinforce learnings in a way that was both timely and relevant. Participants reported applying what they learned in the retreats to step up, speak out, and take on direct roles in the Bill of Rights campaigns, for example. And organizations reported a new energy and dynamism among worker leaders that came from focusing on their power and purpose while checking progress on their organizing plans developed during the retreats.

Third, SOL faced trauma. Trauma and healing work are relevant to any group, but it was particularly imperative for this cohort given the experiences of most domestic workers and those they are organizing. SOL was respectful of the individual realities of trauma and healing but connected them to an understanding of the impact of oppressive conditions and how to address these more powerfully through the organizing work.

Fourth, the SOL facilitation team modeled transformation. The coming together of NDWA, gs, and SJL to co-create SOL reflected a blending of capacities—a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts. Each had its own distinct self-interest in the success of the program, thus there was a high level of investment from each collaborating organization. Working together took trust and humility. Each was an expert and had to realize the expertise that others brought in order to come together to co-create the most effective program. For SOL, the team of facilitators developed their own collective transformational practice, and they practiced together.

Lastly, the SOL team made adjustments along the way. They started with ambitious goals—and with too much information to cover for each retreat, organizers had to make intentional choices to narrow the scope while keeping the outcomes in sight. We lift this up because sometimes focusing on less accomplishes more—and flexibility and adaptability are crucial in innovation and experimentation.

LOOKING FORWARD

We offer three sets of recommendations for: strengthening the domestic worker movement, building the field of transformative movement building, and funding the field of transformative movement building. Among the specific recommendations include building organizing capacity among under-represented workers, such as black domestic workers, refreshing theories of transformation, strengthening the scaffolding to support transformative work, and transforming philanthropy itself.

SOL was equally about achieving rights and resilience, developing as individuals and as a cohort, and strengthening organizations and the



movement. SOL was as much about the soul of those organizing as it was about the strategy for change. While this was a holistic and elegant theory of change, it presented a conundrum for measuring impact.

We try to address impact in this report—and not simply because that was part of our contract but because we recognize the importance of sharing learnings with the field. While we were focused on the hard analytical and political skills we saw participants gaining, we were reminded that social movements not only need to shift policy and power but they also need to change hearts and minds. None of that happens without a broader vision, a deeper sense of connection, and a theory and practice that take spirit seriously.

The crisis of inequality we face in the United States is not just about the damage to our shared economic potential—it is also about the signal we send that some people can simply be left behind. The crisis of record deportations we confront is not just about enforcement gone awry—it is also about the sense that separating some families is just fine. The crisis of political polarization we see is not just about the stalling of legislation in Washington—it is about a sentiment that sorting and separating is fine because the other is way too “other.”

Repairing the U.S. economy and polity will require repairing the nation’s soul. This, after all, was the promise of the civil rights movements—not just that we would strike down barriers but that the nation would, in the words of Martin Luther King, “. . . rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed.” The SOL program was ambitious, but it is part of a much larger effort to connect people across generations and geographies, across sectors and social class, to find what sometimes seems so elusive these days: a more perfect union both in ourselves and in our world.

