

WITHIN OUR LIFETIME

The story of a national network
of racial healing practitioners
and racial equity advocates
working to end racism
within our lifetimes



Created 2019-2020
*A case study and resource for
activists, healers, educators,
and anyone working for
racial justice in the United States*

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2011-2012: BUILD THE FIELD



The Context: 2011

In the U.S., during the third year of President Barack Obama's first term:

- Alabama legislators passed House Bill 56, which criminalized undocumented immigrants and was viewed as even more punitive and far-reaching than Arizona's SB 1070.
- The first and only universal health care law was passed in Vermont after organizers proactively built partnerships between low-income organizing groups and Latinx immigrant organizations.
- After an Associated Press series revealed undercover police surveillance in NYC's Muslim communities, Muslim leaders held teach-ins to help members of the community understand their rights.
- A federal judge approved a \$1.25 billion settlement in the Pigford class-action lawsuit filed against the U.S. Department of Agriculture by thousands of Black farmers. Plaintiffs successfully argued that they suffered widespread racial bias.
- A federal jury convicted five New Orleans police officers of charges related to the cover-up and deprivation of civil rights related to the shooting of unarmed Black Americans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.
- After years of organizing by immigrant and human rights groups, the U.S. Department of Justice accused the Maricopa County, AZ, Sheriff's Office of engaging in a pattern or practice of unconstitutional policing.

Against that backdrop, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation launched an initiative called "America Healing."

*Selected milestones via the *Timeline of Race, Racism, Resistance and Philanthropy 1992-2014: Philanthropic Initiatives for Racial Equity: Critical Issues Forum VOL. 5*, June 2014
<https://racialequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CIF5Timeline.pdf>

Kellogg began by inviting 300+ people representing racial justice organizations to a spring conference in Asheville, NC.

Before the plenaries and workshops began, Kellogg held what they described as an "extraordinary day of healing." From their website:*



Dr. Gail Christopher, vice president of program strategy...reasoned that grantees, as well as civic and civil rights leaders, can better enact meaningful change in their communities if they are engaged in healing sessions, where they gain a more comprehensive understanding of their own feelings and grasp the pain and suffering of others – whites and people of color alike.

The healing circles gathered participants to focus, from the start, on relationship and trust building. Attention to these two things was an essential precursor that would allow participants to heal from the wounds of the past, and build mutually respectful relationships across racial, ethnic and other perceived lines of difference by honoring and valuing each person's humanity. The circles became a standing tradition for subsequent America Healing and Kellogg's TRHT Initiative events.

Soon after, Dr. Susan Glisson emailed colleagues from racial justice and racial healing organizations to discern interest in creating a national network.

The response was strong.

Dr. Glisson, who drew inspiration from both Ella Baker and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was Founding Director of the University of Mississippi's William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation.



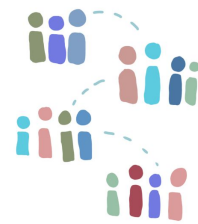
*<https://www.wkkf.org/what-we-do/featured-work/stories/coming-to-grips-with-racism/>

Early Milestones



In **April 2012, during another America Healing Conference**, a conversation in an Open Space session yielded a number of ideas about the value of a national network and how it could help to build and sustain a movement to end racism in our society.

In **August and December 2012, again with Kellogg's support, the William Winter Institute convened national meetings** in Chicago to discuss the potential value of such a network and how it could help to strengthen the momentum of the racial justice/racial healing movement.



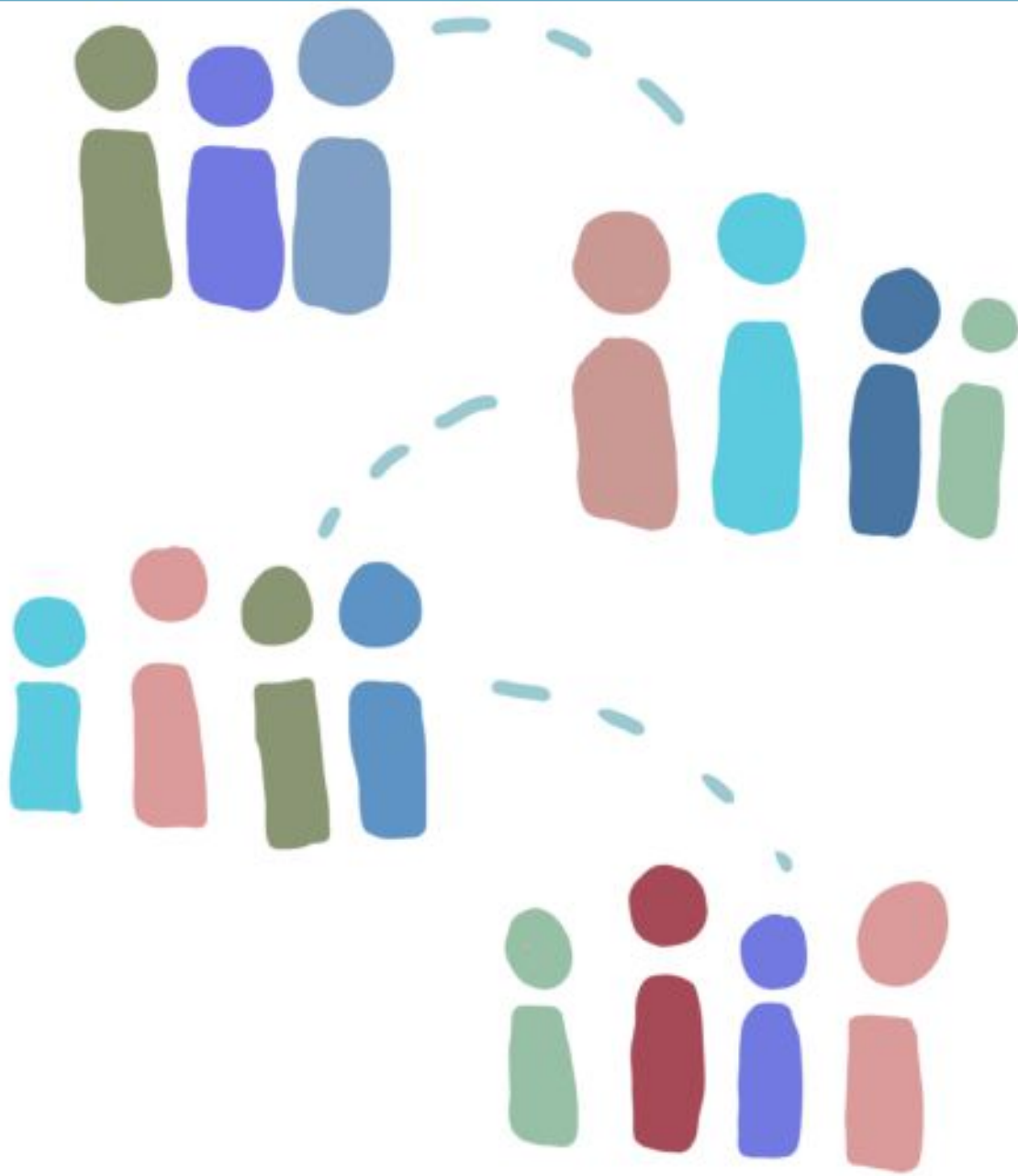
Attendees agreed that times called for a level of urgency. Soon the group was talking about a call to action to end racism within our lifetime.



DECEMBER 2012: Seven people volunteered as an interim working group to gather information from folks in the field to build WOL.

They launched a **national survey** to solicit views on the potential value of creating a network of racial equity/racial healing organizations and practitioners and on the types of activities that would maximize such a network's value to organizations.

2012-2013: BUILD THE NETWORK



IN OUR OWN WORDS: THE EARLY DAYS

Based on location, skills, identities represented, and practical questions of who had bandwidth to volunteer, seven people from across the U.S. came together to form the Interim Leadership Group: Dushaw Hockett, Mike Wenger, Jeanné Lewis, Lloyd Asato, Robin Toma, Susan Glisson, and Maggie Potapchuk.



Susan Glisson remembered a contentious moment with an elder who took issue with the proposed name. "She said, 'You know, ending racism's not going to be possible within our lifetime.' And I use Dushaw Hockett's response line to this day. He said, **'Well, you know, Martin Luther King didn't say he had an issue. He said he had a dream.'** He and others really pushed us to shift ourselves to be imaginative, to be science fiction writers, to imagine what was possible and not be limited by cynicism about the past."

"I believe in thinking about the possibilities in where we can get to, not so much where we are."

- Carolyn Abdullah, an active member during WOL's early years

Maggie Potapchuk recalled: "In some ways, it was like a deer in the headlights as we all tried to figure out how to create this network from scratch. Lloyd Asato built a website; Dushaw Hockett led the creation of the vision statement that would guide WOL through the years; and the group began to brainstorm what 'ending racism within our lifetime' might actually look like based on what we began hearing from the survey and our regional calls."

Charting a Path: WOL's National Survey

In April 2013, the Interim Leadership Group (ILG) released the results of their national survey.



They had sent it to approximately 580 people representing many organizations working on racial healing/racial equity, including those who had participated in the America Healing initiative. 215 people responded, a 37% return rate.

- Of the respondents, 60% were people of color and 40% were white.
- Among the 70% who shared which state they lived in, 33 states and the District of Columbia were represented.
- Sixty-six percent worked for nonprofits. Less than half worked nationally (46%); 23% worked locally, 21% regionally, and 10% internationally.
- The top five focus areas of the organizations represented were 1) Education, 2) Structural racism and institutional barriers, 3) Reconciliation and healing, 4) Dialogue and community building, and 5) Grassroots community organizing.

Participants believed it would be valuable if the network could **provide opportunities for members to meet** (online and in person, whether regionally or by issue area or strategies/approach) to exchange information and learn from others. They hoped WOL would provide opportunities to **increase members' knowledge and skills**. And they also hoped WOL would raise public awareness of members' activities; serve as a clearinghouse for research on different issues and strategies; and provide opportunities to collectively work together on, or respond to, issues.

IN OUR OWN WORDS: ANONYMOUS QUOTES FROM THE 2013 SURVEY

"A network like this could easily be built in such a way that it perpetuates the racist status quo it purports to be fighting. The people/organizations that have control of the power and resources will continue to control how resources are used, set agendas, prioritize ideas and voices, define the problem and determine solutions."

"The field desperately needs to establish a recognized and accepted set of metrics that can solidly measure the impact of interventions and cessation of racist policies, structures and systems on the quality of everyone's life."

"Healing is deeper than 'cure' and must engage all aspects of the human experience. Racial healing involves compassionate public policy and the deconstruction of institutional racism."

"I have a lingering, nagging concern about how a network that is focused on racial healing and racial equity will deal with the intersection of oppressions."

"I would be very greatly supportive of a network that has an action agenda - we can't continue on the path of identifying racist situations and agonizing; we have to develop well conceived, feasible and realistic strategies for change. My organization would be very willing to be active in such a process."

"There needs to be a clear path and clear leadership for next steps...Let's avoid having a beautiful wedding without a real marriage."

Official Launch

In May 2013, WOL went public.

Working together remotely, the Interim Leadership Group agreed on a vision statement (see next page) and launched withinourlifetime.net.*



*This website is no longer active. Learn more about WOL's work via the archives at www.disruptphilanthropy.org.

WOL'S VISION STATEMENT

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, endorse the formation of a national network for the purpose of advancing a new sense of what is possible within the five areas of racial healing and equity described below. In doing so, we are committing to be part of the national conversation - the journey - to define and give birth to this ground-breaking effort. Thus, we may not have all the answers to the HOW, but we are so inspired by the vision below that we are willing to help shape it.

- **CREATE A SENSE OF MOVEMENT.** Advance a proactive and cross-sector movement that eliminates or significantly transforms race and racism in our lifetime. And, in the process (and just as important), inspires people to believe—and act on the belief—that this can be achieved.
- **BUILD THE FIELD.** Define and support the relatively new—and still emerging—field of healing and personal transformation as well as continue to build the capacity of organizations focused on racial equity.
- **CONNECT THE DOTS.** Promote and support approaches that leverage strategies for healing with efforts to transform inequitable systems and structures.
- **SHARE AND DEEPEN KNOWLEDGE.** Serve as a hub for knowledge, resources and tools related to healing and the nexus between healing and equity.
- **BRING THE HEAT AND THE POWER.** Through our collective infrastructure—and an approach that blends strategies for healing and equity (possibly through Healing and Equity Action Teams)—provide rapid response support to communities, organizations and institutions grappling with incidents of racism. And through a parallel approach that is proactive, identify and engage “acupuncture points” within inequitable systems and structures to which, if collective power was applied, can potentially bring about deep and long lasting (if not permanent) change in ways not yet experienced.

Momentum Grows, As Does Structure



Some milestones from WOL's first year and a half:

- Sept. 2013: WOL held six regional calls with 120+ people from across the country.
- Dec. 2013: WOL launched two working groups, one on Implicit Bias and the other on Governance.
- Late 2013: Roberta Avila, Lila Cabbil, and Al White joined the Interim Leadership Group.
- May 2014: The team formalized and shared WOL's Values.
- Aug. 2014: The Governance Working Group finalized a structure, including membership criteria, leadership process, decision-making chart, and more.

2014-2015: ACTIVATE THE NETWORK



National Context

2014 was a remarkable year for protests worldwide, including in Ferguson, MO, after Michael Brown Jr. was killed.

Among other milestones that year:

- Officials in Flint, MI downgraded the drinking water source to a cheaper one, causing at least 12 deaths from Legionnaires' disease.
- The Supreme Court turned back the clock on hard-won civil rights by upholding the University of Michigan's ban on considering race as a factor in university admissions.
- A mistrial was declared on the count of murder in the shooting death of 17-year-old Jordan Davis by Michael Dunn, even after Dunn admitted to shooting Davis during an argument over loud music.
- The U.S. Department of Justice launched the National Center for Building Community Trust and Justice to collect and analyze data on racial profiling in order to reduce racial bias in the criminal justice system.
- After President Obama launched My Brother's Keeper, ten foundations announced investments totaling \$200 million over the next five years.

Meanwhile, WOL's national Implicit Bias campaign grew, and its Governance Working Group invested significant energy into further clarifying the network's values, leadership, and decision-making model.

Governance

In January 2014, two working groups began meeting regularly: one to lead a National Campaign To Combat the Impact Of Implicit Bias, and a second to define WOL's Governance. The "how" was as important as the "what."

In May 2014, the Governance Working Group articulated WOL's Values (see next page) based on the results of the national survey and conversations on regional calls, and shared them with everyone involved.

In September 2014, the Governance Working Group (Jeanné Lewis and Maggie Potapchuk (co-chairs), Beth Applegate, Lila Cabbil, Diane Finnerty, Kevin John Fong, Claudia Horwitz, Alex Mikulich, Julie Nelson, and Terry Soto) finalized WOL governance structure, including membership criteria, leadership process, decision-making chart, and more. The Interim Leadership Working Group (Lloyd Y. Asato, Roberta Avila, Lila Cabbil, Susan Glisson, Dushaw Hockett, Jeanné Isler, Maggie Potapchuk, Robin Toma, Mike Wenger, and Al White) unanimously agreed.

"Our vision to dismantle racism within our lifetime will be bolstered when we innovate and experiment, work interdependently, and share a creative and tenacious message for racial healing and equity, grounded in a belief that everyone's human rights must be recognized."

- WOL Governance Committee + Interim Leadership Group, 2014

WOL'S VALUES

AS SHARED WITH THE NETWORK IN 2014

BE INTENTIONAL AND VIGOROUS IN ENSURING DIVERSITY.

This includes racial and ethnic identities, geographic location, focus of organization's work (i.e. racial healing, racial equity), organization sizes and types, diversity and intersectionalities of individual identities (specifically gender, sexual orientation, class), and young leaders. We will be especially vigilant in ensuring the intentional diversity of the network's leadership. Furthermore, we believe that the formal governing structure, as ultimately defined, should be composed of a majority of people who are members of historically oppressed populations.

ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE PRACTICES.

Our goal is to develop policies and practices that reflect what we hope to create in the larger world, which may mean, at times, slowing down to share our philosophy with members, collaborators, and funders, and standing up for our values and principles rather than complying with inequitable or exclusionary practices. The Network practices and processes shall strive to be reflective of diverse cultures and ensuring dominant culture is not replicated in negative ways.

BUILD TRUST AND RESPECT FOR OUR COLLECTIVE WORK TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL RACISM.

We will work to create a common language which is reflective of the spectrum of approaches. This will assist us to lean in with curiosity to learn our philosophical and strategic differences to dismantle racism by avoiding proselytizing, holding conflict respectfully, contextualizing different points of view, and seeking alignment.

(continued)



BE TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE.

Leadership will ensure there is transparency with our practices, and an accountability process implemented. The Leadership Team will be accountable to its members. The WOL Network will be accountable to communities of color and indigenous peoples. In addition to a value, accountability is behavioral, and the Leadership Team will develop clear and transparent mechanisms for accountability. When tension exists with our values of inclusion and action, the Leadership Team will seek to recognize our commitment to both, and will transparently deliberate how best to balance those values.

BE TENACIOUS AND RESPONSIVE.

The Network will be aware of what is happening on the ground, to recognize mistakes, to be nimble to shift gears, and remain attentive to the intersectionality of issues and identities. We will grow the pie of resources for the Network's members and our collective work and work tenaciously for equitable distribution of resources.

Implicit Bias Campaign

One issue the group decided to prioritize was implicit bias, which was mainstream at that point. Dushaw Hockett, left, and Mike Wenger, right, led the early days of the National Campaign To Combat the Impact Of Implicit Bias.



Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness. Many studies have indicated that implicit biases affect individuals' attitudes and actions, thus creating real world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals' stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess.*

In March 2014 and September 2014, WOL offered two public webinars to gauge interest and garner support. The first was led by Cheryl Staats of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University; the second by Rachel Godsil of The Perception Institute. Both drew 100+ attendees.



*State of the Science Implicit Bias Review 2013, Cheryl Staats, Kirwan Institute, The Ohio State University

WOL's Implicit Bias campaign gained major momentum.

In October 2014, the campaign launched nationally and in eight "anchor jurisdictions": Boston/Greater New England; Washington, DC; St. Louis, MO; Bloomington, IN; Montgomery/Birmingham, AL; New Orleans/Mississippi; Albuquerque, NM; Los Angeles County, CA.

Through the campaign, WOL:

- Encouraged approximately 6,000 people to take the Implicit Association Test (IAT)
- Convened in-person dialogues in each jurisdiction and a Twitter town hall for 200+
- Presented about implicit bias at conferences like Facing Race, the White Privilege Conference, Healing History, and more
- Collaborated with Everyday Democracy and the Southern Poverty Law Center to create facilitation guides for IAT dialogues
- Developed informal partnerships with the National Collaborative for Health Equity, the National Park Service, the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies, the Association of American Colleges & Universities, Everyday Democracy, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Perception Institute, and Community Cinema
- Reached hundreds of thousands, and perhaps millions, through aggressive print press, radio and social media outreach efforts.

But the network spoke, and WOL leadership listened. There was much more work to do in the fight to end racism.

First Staff Hire

In October 2014, WOL hired **Catherine Han Montoya** to coordinate the Implicit Bias Campaign.



Cathy was a self-described Queer Chicana Korean Feminist (and Broncos fan). A movement leader who worked at the intersections of API, immigrant, and LGBTQ organizing, she was the Founder of National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum's Atlanta chapter and had worked with Southeast Immigrant Rights Network, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice, American Civil Liberties Union, and National Council of La Raza.

Cathy's role as an organizer transformed the network.

Funding Survey

In February 2015, Within Our Lifetime launched a national Racial Justice Funding Survey.

The purpose was to gather baseline data on the state of funding for racial equity and healing organizations and to learn more about funding relationships so that WOL could collectively determine strategies for working with foundations.

They received 149 responses. Some stories emerged of effective grantmaking practices. But many more pointed to **philanthropy's lack of commitment to (or understanding of) racial equity** in processes, vision, and grantmaking strategies.

This qualitative data informed a mandate, a mission that guided WOL over the years that followed – and that still guides the work of many alumni.



One question was **"What is the biggest challenge for your organization to effectively do racial equity/healing work, other than funding?"**

Responses included: 1) Lack of understanding of racism and disparities present in communities, 2) Funding intermediaries and expecting trickle-down funding, 3) Micromanaging our resources and questioning expenditures, 4) Avoiding risk by only funding known organizations and predominately white organizations, 5) Demanding multiple measures of effectiveness, 6) Forcing solutions and ignoring stakeholder voices, and 7) Securing general operating support.

IN OUR OWN WORDS: ADVICE FOR FOUNDATIONS

Following the funding survey, Within Our Lifetime compiled and issued this advice from the field for foundations that embrace (or seek to embrace) a racial equity analysis in their grant-making:

EDUCATE yourselves, your boards and your funding panels about the manifestations of systemic and structural racism and white superiority.

DEFINE the parameters of a clear racial equity analysis in partnership with people of color. Know what you mean when you say “racial equity analysis.”

APPLY the analysis rigorously to your own organizational infrastructure, leadership, policies and practices.

COMMUNICATE your analysis to your grantees and provide them with the tools to apply the analysis to themselves and their programs.

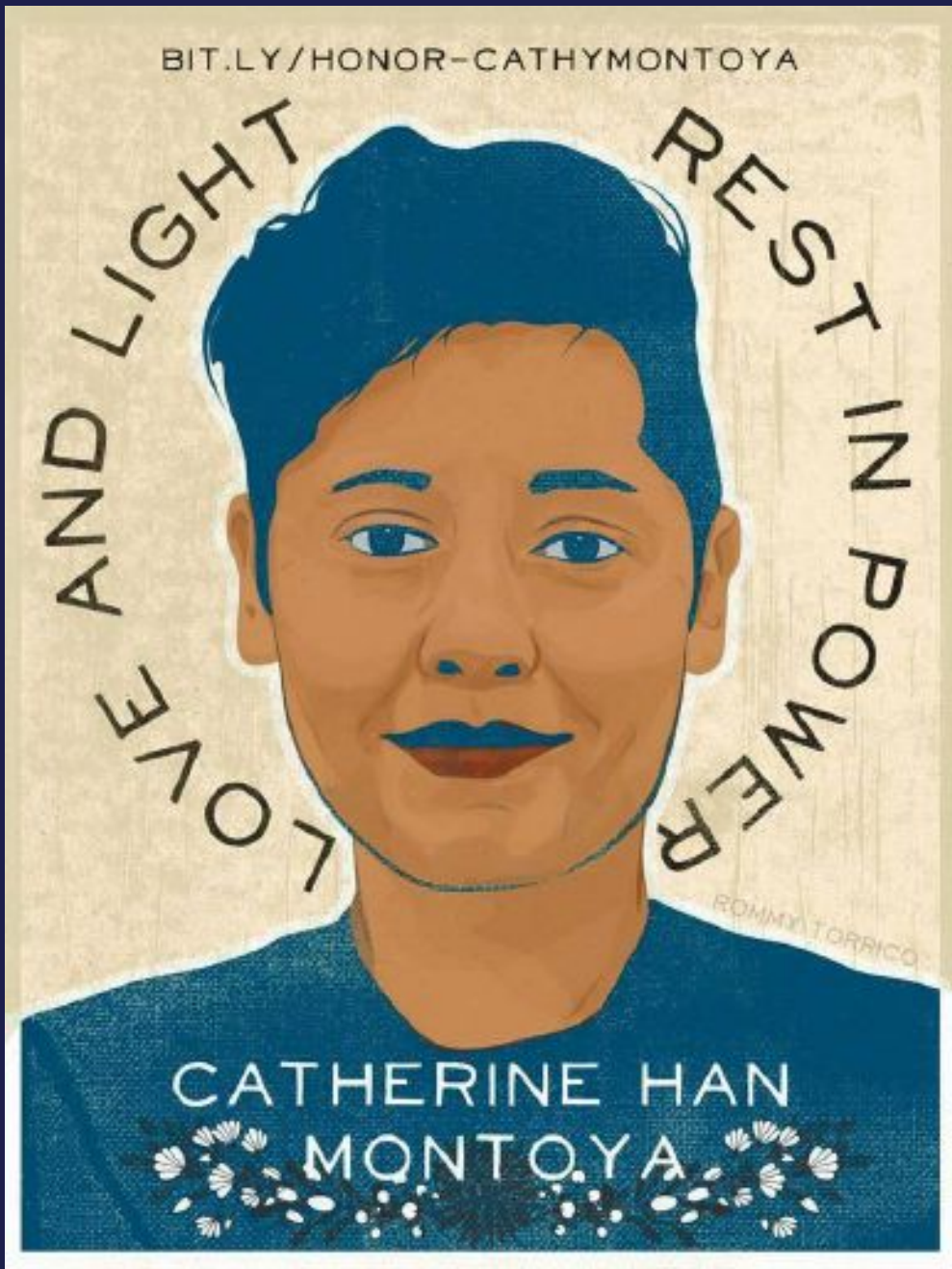
SUSTAIN your general operating support for grantees. It will take more time to dismantle racist systems and structures than it took to construct them. Support and value the people who organize, partner, educate and advocate!

PARTNER with your grantees to develop real, measurable and achievable outcomes for social change. You’re in this together!

Unexpected Tragedy

In April 2015, Catherine Han Montoya,
WOL's only staffer, was murdered.

It was a tremendous shock and a terrible loss.



By Rommy Torrico

Summer 2015: A Pause.

WOL's leadership took some time to regroup. During this period, they held an Interim Leadership Retreat in Los Angeles, CA; some natural attrition occurred among the leadership team; and the group began to make plans for what might come next for the work ahead.

**"We need to go as fast as we can
and as slow as we must."**

- Mama Lila Cabbil, WOL Leadership Council Member

Mike Wenger remembered that Cathy's loss, "more than anything, was a real barrier to sustaining the momentum that we were gaining. It was an emotional blow, but also she had begun to organize us, to focus our attention, and to keep us moving. When she was killed, that all just sort of fell apart. Because everybody had other responsibilities, and we had come to rely on her to keep us together and keep us moving forward. **I think we were just emotionally stunned, and it affected our ability to work together and to make progress.**"

Earlier that spring, WOL had continued to recruit, including at the May 2015 America Healing Conference. The network was up to 65 organizational members. The Interim Leadership Team posted a job listing for a new full-time Network Coordinator. And the Governance Working Group began to plan an especially critical meeting for that winter: it was time for WOL to choose a new Leadership Council.

2015: REIMAGINE AND REBUILD



A New Chapter: Allen Arrives



In November 2015, Allen Kwabena Frimpong was hired as WOL's new network coordinator.

Allen's background was in organizing, economic justice, environmental justice, philanthropic strategy, and capacity building. Three weeks into the job, he traveled to Dallas for a WOL event. "The old Leadership Council had hired him, but those of us on the planning committee hadn't interacted with him," remembered Kevin John Fong. "It was such a wonderful, refreshing surprise to have him there."

"Allen walked in with such confidence and competence. It was like: All right, we've got this, we have someone to carry this through."

- Kevin John Fong, WOL Leadership Council

"Everybody was trying to set WOL up as a typical organization," Maggie Potapchuk added, "and Allen really framed it for folks as a network."

New Leadership for a New Model



WOL's previous Interim Leadership Group had planned the December 2015 gathering in Dallas, TX, where—in addition to meeting Allen in person—participants would plot a roadmap for "how to end racism within our lifetimes," and elect their first Leadership Council.

That process turned out to be messy and uncomfortable. It evolved in real time.



IN OUR OWN WORDS: THE RADICAL NATURE OF THE 2015 LEADERSHIP GATHERING

Years later, Kevin John Fong remembered: "From a design perspective, what we created was something pretty open in it's design and process. What we found was a whole bunch of surprises. **Over half the people who came to that gathering were brand new to WOL.** None of us had ever heard of these folks! [The invitation] had reached two or three degrees of separation. It was really invigorating to see that they had traveled to Dallas not on a whim, but on a show of faith that something is happening here. We wanted to do good by that."

Maggie and Jeanné had developed a whole process to elect the new Leadership Council members. It involved presentations from all these newcomers followed by a vote for those who best represented WOL's desired Leadership Characteristics.

But, Kevin recounted, "The process got completely turned on its side. We ended up doing something else. It was revolutionary, and really difficult. What was set before [Dallas] was: 'There will be eight people on the Council, they'll meet this often, and here's the budget.' There were limitations to the budget based on the grant we'd received from funders. I call this *feeding the dragon*. And then as the Dallas gathering unfolded and [the group] was like, 'well, how 'bout a Leadership Council of 16?' some of the first questions were: 'If we only have this much money, how will we sustain that?' Well, the dragon was in the room, preventing us from saying 'Hey, let's take the dragon out of the room and talk about what's good, and what we need.'"

Network Member Tony Watkins recalled an attendee named Julia, "a younger person from Dallas, who kind of interrupted the whole process and said, *Is it just me or does anyone find this soul-crushing?* The core team wasn't really in question but the rest of us were basically running for spots. So facilitators had to shift the process." Jeanné remembers that "**wrestling with it was difficult, but I feel like there was fruit in that wrestling.**"

Kevin said, "I really want to lift up Maggie and Jeanné because, as members of the founding Leadership Council and co-chairs of this whole thing, they felt a great deal of ownership and accountability to the process, the network, and the funder. They were holding it down.

"But at some point they were really ready to say, 'You know what? I release this.' To see Maggie and Jeanné just give it over — it wasn't a surrender, it was an offering."

And, Kevin contends, "It was a statement: 'We don't have to play into this whole patriarchal capitalist dragon blah blah blah.' Once we released the dragon, anything was possible." Mama Lila Cabbil agreed: "It was painful, but through the pain and tension I felt we birthed a really powerful way forward from where we were."



WOL's new Leadership Council at the end of the 2015 Dallas gathering.

Trish also remembers the Dallas gathering as "the first time I met Allen. He had just been brought on as Network Coordinator so he wasn't running the show quite yet, but his specific role there was to talk about decentralized networks. I've since seen this presentation a number of times but at that time I was like, *who is this guy?* Also he was wearing kente cloth sneakers. I was almost immediately, like, devoted to him: This guy's the real deal, he's so smart, and he just knows how to do this. **Ending racism within our lifetime? I actually think Allen knows how.**"

2016-2018: ACTIVATE THE NETWORK

WOL kept working as the national landscape shifted dramatically.



Overview: WOL's Later Chapters



In the three years following the late 2015 leadership reset, the network launched many campaigns, committees, and working groups. Some thrived.

The Dallas gathering birthed a new Leadership Council with 16 members, four from the original founding group—Maggie Potapchuk, Lila Cabbil, Al White, and Dushaw Hockett—plus 12 newcomers. No one knew exactly what their roles meant, since the entire approach was new.

Maggie and Dushaw met weekly with Allen to support and advise him in his new role, so "in Dragon Language," as Kevin John Fong puts it, "Maggie and Dushaw were effectively co-chairs. Eventually Dushaw needed to transition out of this role, and so Maggie asked me to come into it."

Meanwhile, Kevin and a dozen others committed to working on Resource Development via conference calls over the course of 2016. Trish Tchume, a new member who was headed abroad for a sabbatical, agreed to take on a bigger leadership role when she returned.

In the final months of the Obama administration and as the 45th President entered office, WOL working groups emerged, caught fire, and grew.

Some groups dissolved when needs were met or when members shifted focus; **others did not have the resources to succeed.** "Many of us have spent most of our lives working in institutions and organizations," one member reflected, "so the network model was at times hard to adjust to." While they were passionate about the work (like ending the school to prison pipeline), everyone involved day jobs (or night jobs, or multiple jobs) — some of which were unsupportive. Dedicating additional time to conference calls, planning meetings, and in-person get-togethers was demanding.

In interviews years later, one community member expressed frustration, saying bluntly that while he believed there was tremendous value in the relationship building and rapid response work, "WOL was really limited by the decentralized network framework." It turned out to be much **easier for WOL to "swarm" when highly visible needs emerged.**



When community members expressed urgent needs for solidarity, WOL members found ways to make it happen. They could get their organizations to sign on to public statements after the racial crises in Tulsa or Charlotte. Some mobilized friends and traveled to Standing Rock in 2016 when local organizers asked for support fighting the Dakota Access Pipeline.

**IN OUR OWN WORDS:
ALLEN KWABENA FRIMPONG**

Q. Tell me about WOL's day-to-day operations in those years.

Allen: I think there were some expectations around the Communities of Practice (COPs) doing some of the work, but these individuals also worked for nonprofits that may or may not have known that their staff were working some of the time on this other movement building network. Whenever there was something goal oriented that came out of an urgent situation, the network swarmed together. But when there was something day-to-day, like a call about the [ongoing] implicit bias project, people would end up prioritizing their responsibilities at work and bailing on the call.

Q. What worked and what didn't? What can future organizers learn from this?

A: Having a network of nonprofit organizations is not effective unless the whole organization really is bought into a networked way of doing work, not just the individual who's involved. So if something happens in Flint because of the water crisis, how does the entire organization support that effort and be adaptive, without the people in that job who represent the network feeling like it's this secret thing they're doing on the side that isn't aligned with their work plan and the grant and the funder and the other community? Where is that leverage? What are some material and nonmaterial resources orgs can contribute that allow people to use "borrowed time," that allows people to work on rapid response when people are called to re-prioritize themselves? People got excited and felt called into their leadership when there was a situation of crisis and they showed up either as an organizational rep or an individual. Even if there is org buy-in, people feel called in as individual leaders because they don't want the crisis to continue. In order to address crises, we have to address root causes, and to do that, we have to address structures and systems. And in order to do that you have to change culture.

Q: To take a mundane example, what's something you wish had happened culturally in those moments when people bailed on the conference calls?

A: Just acknowledge and say the energy is not there, let's just stop. We don't have to do that! If there isn't a yearning and desire for folks to move, it's OK to let things pass on. In nonprofit culture, we say, "well, we have to have the call, we have to keep doing the program, we got the funding." But this is ineffective. We create ecological waste. We actually do more harm! Because we expend more energy than is wanted and needed, and people feel the demands on their time can't be fulfilled. So then they feel guilty that they couldn't make the call instead of acknowledging "hey, this is not where people want to put their energy." We re-traumatize people because they can't make the commitments — and then they're afraid to acknowledge they can't make them. **We place these borders on people's commitments and we use them to say people aren't committed to their own lives, work, liberation.**



WOL had done the implicit bias work for a year and a half, and it was successful, and we could have stopped. Instead of "what do we do next?" the questions could have been "what did we do well, what did we learn, what makes sense now, what's the next step?" But there's fear that people might judge if you do that. So they continued with the project.

But eventually they saw that the energy wasn't there. Our default behavior is "we have to continue it!" but how do you continue it, why do you continue it? Maybe it needs to evolve into something else. Takes discernment and intuitive mindset? Perhaps we just need to stick with just doing one thing really well. I don't think the culture in the nonprofit sector and philanthropic sector is this. It was actually the network's strength.

Q. Were there moments when WOL teammates really *worked* together like this?

A: There were a lot of examples of people responding to urgency, people *moving*: When Mama Lila [Cabbil] called for support around the Flint water crisis, people came together. When we went to Facing Race in 2016 after Trump got elected, WOL was in full force. When Families United For Justice had their annual convening, Kevin John Fong and Mama Lila did workshops with families impacted by state-sanctioned violence. When I was able to go down to Columbus, OH I got support from network members even though it wasn't an official WOL thing. Charlottesville was maybe the biggest example. People came together and contributed where they could. Lecia Brooks talked about our work on MSNBC. These were all tangible moments where I could see the strength of the network. **But if it didn't have urgency, people didn't make the same investment in it.**

Q. How do you feel about all of this now?

A. Actually, really good about it. When I was in it, there were moments I'd get frustrated: "oh, that meeting's not happening," or "this call about education equity only had three people; something must be wrong." But then I'd pull back.

We need to figure out as a sector, when we get funding for things, when we have a donor who says "we funded you to do XYZ," how can we stop lying to people and say "hey, we need to change prioritizes." **We need to stop seeing failure as pejorative or negative and take it as feedback.** That feedback allows us to tap into what people do need in this moment, what they're tapping into.

So if I were to create a network like this again? I would draw upon the assets of the organizations and the work they're already doing. See how people as individual peers could support one another in their work at their organizations. If I had known then what I know now, that's one of the things I would have designed.

IN OUR OWN WORDS: KEVIN JOHN FONG ON COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Kevin's reflections held similar themes: "Communities of Practice [COPs] held a lot of promise, and it's tempting to say that we fell short. But we didn't fall short, because what was established has potential. It's possible that five years from now, something else could develop. Again, [to write that work off would be] feeding the dragon, right? *We didn't meet those outcomes in that time period.* Well, that's not the time period we're talking about!"

He sees (at least) two major wins from this later chapter of WOL's history. The first was relationships: "Through COPs, we were able to link people in many different places who had similar situations. So Jarrod in Santa Barbara might have an opportunity to lead a racial equity training with local law enforcement, and he could put out the call to that COP. Then Dena in Denver, and Tony in Albuquerque, and Tony in St. Louis, could all respond, 'Yeah! Same!' and they'd start conversations on these calls I was convening, compare efforts, and follow up."



Unfortunately, WOL was unable to secure funding to hold in-person gatherings to convene these groups more often, to visit one another on the ground, bring lessons learned back to their own communities, and "really be able to actualize the network," in Kevin's words. "But that doesn't mean that it isn't going to happen. It just isn't happening right now. What I'm confident about is that, as a result of our COPs, Jarrod can call Tony and Tony is going to take Jarrod's call. *Hey brother, what do you need? And that's pretty amazing.*"

The second big win, in Kevin's view, was a different take on dragon-slaying, and that was the inclusion of racial healing—not "just" racial equity and justice—in WOL's mission, vision, and values, and the active work to keep it front and center:

"In order to ensure and create lasting social change, the work of equity and healing need to go hand in hand. Most of us are involved in the work of equity. The organizing, the policy change, working on the ground — that's the work of the head."

**"Equity is head and body work.
But if you don't do the work of healing, which
is changing deeply held minds and hearts and
traditions, then you're not going to ensure
lasting change."**

He continues: "It's one thing for the courts to say 'OK, same sex marriage is the law of the land,' but that didn't mean social change was guaranteed in Rowan County, KY, when Kim Davis responded, 'I'm the county clerk and you won't be able to get married under my watch.' Or voting rights: [implementing necessary policy changes] won't work unless you do the work of healing."

He explains that WOL recognized that as part of it's DNA. "We really sought out the practices—not as an aside that we had to do as a before and after (like opening a training with a touchy-feely moment and ending with a touchy-feely moment)—but to do the hard real work in between."

And that, Kevin says, is key: "After having been active with WOL, there are wonky equity folks around the country doing more heal-y stuff. And the healers, like me, you know, we recognize the wonky stuff and bring that in."

Zooming Back In: Summer 2016

Internal work continued. **Leadership Council members gathered in St. Louis** to refine and clarify WOL's leadership, governance, and decision-making framework, and refine the network's membership engagement, communications, and strategy.



They identified strategic priorities, including:

- Rapid Response to Crises & Issues
- Intersectional Demonstration Projects
- Member Engagement
- Organizational Learning & Impact
- Message Development & Storytelling

The group developed implementation plans for each priority and goal.



Meanwhile, others were analyzing data, preparing to release the findings and recommendations from the first-ever Racial Justice Funding Survey.

Spotlight: Rapid Response

Also in 2016, WOL formed a Rapid Response Protocols sub-group to identify best practices around urgent racial justice needs.

"The Implicit Bias Community of Practice wasn't really catching wind," recalls Allen, due to the loss of key leaders (Cathy's death, and Dushaw and Mike stepping down from the LC). But in urgent situations—such as in Minneapolis, after police officers killed Jamar Clark (2015) and Philando Castile (2016), or in Baltimore, following the 2016 death of Freddie Gray—local organizers, such as Black Lives Matter activists, would ask for support, and WOL network members would "cluster" in response. **In the stated deliverables WOL owed Kellogg, they had committed to developing a "rapid response system" to activate in moments like these.**

Allen was well-positioned to move this project forward. He gathered members of Movement NetLab, where he also worked at the time, and some of WOL's former Implicit Bias COP members, like Mama Lila Cabbil and Chris Messinger, to brainstorm. He thinks it was Chris who suggested they go back and look at all the recent examples of rapid response that they could, and search for patterns in the field.

"So I brought in Terry Marshall and Aisha Shillingford from the creative studio Intelligent Mischief, and we engaged in a participatory study. We asked people from New York, Baltimore, Flint, Detroit, Standing Rock, all of these places: ***What's working and what's not working in these situations where racial violence of all different typologies is happening?*** We did interviews, started seeing patterns and preliminary findings, tried to develop prototypes for rapid responses.

"Later, Trish Tchume was the one who made up the name: Movement Mic Check."

2016: Enter Trish.

Trish Adobea Tchume brought the number of paid staff to two.

By fall 2016, Allen was holding most of WOL's administrative pieces while also juggling the strategic and tactical pieces of the work. Then Trish Adobea Tchume, a Leadership Council member who'd been on hiatus, returned from a sabbatical in Ghana, and agreed to join the team.

"Everything Trish does is badass," laughs Kevin. "We have this incredible vision statement, and with her on the team, we were all able to take up pieces of that and see it through."



During this period, Allen and Trish worked most closely with Kevin and Maggie; the four gathered for weekly calls and some in-person retreats.

Trish said later that because of her work with WOL, "I show up more relationally and I prioritize getting to know people for real. I never do a call or start a meeting without a check-in question, and that's a huge lesson I'm walking away with...In a movement space, it's so important to create something—whether it's principles or a structure to hold it all—that allows people to bring their gifts forward. (Our partner organization) SwarmLab put it in charts and handouts that we could share, but **I got to live it and see how beautifully it works** and how much it makes possible, with WOL and especially Maggie and Kevin being that anchor."

Late 2016

The November 2016 election results cast urgent and grave light on all of Within Our Lifetime's infrastructure-scaffolding, network-growing, and decentralized-field-building work.

Race Forward's annual Facing Race conference was held days later and offered one chance to regroup and recruit.



Weeks later, in December, six WOL representatives—Trish, Allen, Mama Lila Cabbil, Dr. Ruby Cain, Chris Messinger, and Tony Watkins—joined Movement NetLab's SwarmLab community of practice with five other national groups who were learning how to use network theory and infrastructure to strengthen movements for justice.

Calling In Foundations

In January 2017, the same month as the 45th President's inauguration, WOL used the National Day of Racial Healing platform to highlight the need for more courageous strategies for racial justice funding.



The Racial Justice Funding Survey that WOL had developed two years earlier yielded plenty of stories. Some responses shed light on effective grantmaking practices, but more pointed to the philanthropy's lack of commitment to or understanding of racial equity in processes, vision, and grantmaking strategies.

A team of WOL members analyzed the survey results and identified these major concerns:

- Small grants with demanding reporting schedules
- Unwillingness to marshal political will to fund systems change work
- Privileging white organizations and white culture practices
- Forcing solutions and ignoring stakeholder voices
- Being silent in racialized crises
- Lack of internal racial equity work while expecting grantees to report on theirs
- And requests to educate staff on racial equity with no compensation or support.

Each of these result in differential impact for organizations led by people of color. WOL released a summary of survey findings and sent a call to action letter to over 100 foundations.

Internal Work

In March 2017, the WOL Leadership Council launched a new member orientation model.

The new model introduced new members (and existing members who needed a refresher) to WOL's approach to racial justice organizing and what WOL was learning about network theory.

As with every new practice or system, this was a community-building effort -- not just a logistical one.



August 2017: Charlottesville

With Leadership Council member Chris Messinger, WOL staff Allen Kwabena Frimpong and Trish Tchume answered a call to travel and support counterprotesters during Unite the Right.



"By the time Charlottesville was bubbling up, we had already tracked it — really to Chris's credit, because he had a connection to one person on the ground through JOIN For Justice," Allen recalls. "The Leadership Council had [participated] in Movement NetLab's SwarmLab training, become part of the Rapid Response COP, and started work on Movement Mic Check. And we had the lightest structure possible, I think, to make judgment calls about what we were going to respond to or not."

When they got there, Allen, Trish, and Chris mostly flew under the radar, focusing on uplifting local organizers' efforts. They spent some time together and some apart facilitating healing sessions, supporting and mobilizing resources for organizers of various local groups on the ground, and putting their bodies in the streets.

WOL members who were not physically in the space supported these local efforts too by providing added guidance and emotional support from afar, as well as using their platforms to shine light on what was happening on the ground. For example, Lecia Brooks, the Outreach Director at Southern Poverty Law Center and a WOL Leadership Council member, was invited onto MSNBC to discuss the counterprotests and WOL's contributions.

IN OUR OWN WORDS: CHARLOTTESVILLE

Chris Messinger remembers, "The Charlottesville work was powerful, though 'measurable impact' feels complicated. There is deep and layered trauma for folks who live in Charlottesville. Horrible and profoundly racist things happened long before August 12th, and also in the months immediately preceding that weekend. And after all these national folks left town. Did we have a positive impact? Many folks in Charlottesville appreciated the ways that WOL showed up; some were later also upset and resentful. Some of that is how we showed up, some of that is reflected trauma targeting those closest to us. It was a Both/And. There's a whole section in our Movement Mic Check report that offers suggestions for national orgs trying to do local work."



Trish Tchume later reflected that the time in Charlottesville was probably the most meaningful part of her own work with WOL. "Leading up to that week, I felt like I never actually decided at any point that I was gonna go. I just knew that Chris and Allen were going and that I was afraid for them, and that I was close enough [to travel there]. I was mostly going to make sure that they were going to be OK. We were there as representatives of this network that was supposed to hold this knowledge, and we showed up in that way whenever we could, if folks needed. Allen did a lot of facilitation that weekend for the Black Lives Matter folks, and there were lots of ways that we tried to show up...But mostly it was just that we took care of each other and the folks we met. There were all of these moments where **it just felt like our job was to take care of each other**. I just remember the feeling of relief every time I saw them. And shared sadness, but also comfort."

The Funding Dragon

In Fall 2017, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation "shifted priorities" and ceased funding Within Our Lifetime.

WOL wrote: This was a major loss to WOL, though more importantly, this major shift in strategy meant a significant loss of grant monies to the racial justice field and an immediate impact on the work for an array of organizations at the national and local levels. There had been no warning to grantees regarding this changing strategy. Learning about this decision for WOL was devastating in terms of this five-year relationship ending and the loss of core funding. The greater loss was the impact to racial justice and healing organizations and communities.*

When ending a funding relationship, give your grantees sufficient time for them to conduct the level of development work needed to replace funding, especially if you are a core funder. Grantees are doing urgent critical work that needs to be continued. Sudden losses in funding also put people's livelihoods at risk and funding needs to be replaced so they can continue to provide for their families. An important part of the accountability process in calling a foundation in to share the impact of their inequitable practices and to discuss changes that need to be made requires us to inform them prior to the release of the story.

We can no longer whisper to each other, or yell behind closed doors, or call up our favorite program officer and vent. Just as we use data and stories publicly to challenge immigration, criminal justice, health, educational inequities, so must we use data and stories to challenge philanthropy to do right by our communities. We need to publicly lift up foundations and affinity groups who have worked steadfastly for justice internally and externally. Yet we also must name the foundations that have served as poor gatekeepers, whose lack of action impedes the progress necessary to achieve racial justice, and who claim they are all about racial equity but don't walk the talk.

*From blog posts published April 26, 2018 and May 3, 2018
<https://disruptphilanthropy.org/blog/>

WOL kept working.

Launch of #DisruptPhilanthropyNOW!

Spring 2018: Along with the Old Money New System Community of Practice and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, WOL issued an invitation to movement building groups and racial justice and healing organizations. The call was for courageous and collective action:

We urge groups to challenge philanthropy to develop racially just grantmaking practices and transform structures, so we can collectively tackle structural racism and white supremacy to end racism within our lifetimes.

We must move beyond transactional funding relationships to demand accountability with philanthropy as we demand it in other sectors.

We need to come together as racial justice organizations to radically transform philanthropy.

WE CAN NO LONGER LET FEAR OF CONSEQUENCES DETER US FROM SPEAKING OUR TRUTH ABOUT THE IMPACT OF UNJUST PRACTICES BY OUR FUNDERS.

By July 2018, Within Our Lifetime would **publicly name the W.K. Kellogg Foundation** as the foundation partner from whom they were demanding accountability.

IN OUR OWN WORDS: MAGGIE POTAPCHUK ON #DISRUPTPHILANTHROPYNOW!

Maggie recounts: "Following the funding survey, after 45 was elected, we sent a letter to about 100 funders and said, 'This is how we need you to show up.'" The Kellogg Foundation's response was particularly harmful.

"So many of us had worked with Kellogg over the years: We'd been called in to do things for them off the record, to do technical assistance...So it wasn't just that they didn't give us the money. It was a hard relationship break, and the way it was done was extremely messy."

She continues, "We started the #DisruptPhilanthropyNOW! blog and movement because we sensed, *We have to do something, but this isn't just about Kellogg, this is about philanthropy. **We're not going to end racism within our lifetime if we're not talking about the philanthropic sector, about how resources are distributed.*** We're not going to get to our vision. Allen was the one who said, 'Why don't we frame it as an invitation for courageous and collective action instead of a campaign per se?' and it just bubbled from there. We began writing a series of blog posts." (See disruptphilanthropy.org/blog.)

But when they published the first post, Maggie hoped for a different outcome. "We had been talking and talking about whether we would name Kellogg. And right when we were about to publish the blog, a Leadership Council member made the case not to name them because their organization was receiving funding from Kellogg and was concerned about the risk mostly to their community. There were other members who also received funding and expressed some concerns. I understood the risk, though I was hoping we would be bold at that time."

It would take a little longer until all were ready for courageous collective action.

(continued)



WOL members met again with Kellogg staff to follow up on the accountability letter. Their message and actions in the meeting continued to disappoint. At that point, Leadership Council voted to name Kellogg in the next blog and share more details of the story.

Maggie says that #DisruptPhilanthropyNOW! has "opened some doors up. I've gotten calls from folks who share outrageous stories of funders' actions and aren't willing to name them. Again, we have a vision without the bandwidth. We have a working group, but everyone has had very limited time to keep working on it. It's been hard getting more outreach done to build momentum...I hope that in the coming years we can deepen and widen the reverberations for the blog. But time will tell."

Kevin later named this as an example of the "badass imagination" he saw over and over throughout the WOL life cycle: "When Maggie said we are not going to just take this behavior from the Kellogg Foundation — some members, their livelihood was at stake, they couldn't just sign on. But the way that Maggie framed it, and the way that she processed it so that people who were getting funding from Kellogg could be protected but still be part of that process, was really genius."

#DisruptPhilanthropyNOW! continues and a new site launched August 2020. To get involved, visit disruptphilanthropy.org.

Movement Mic Check

In March 2018, in partnership with Movement Net Lab and Intelligent Mischief, WOL released a report and opened a Community of Practice called **Movement Mic Check: Rapid Response to Racial Disasters**.



Working with and for three key audiences—organizers and activists on the ground, intermediary partners nationally supporting local racial disasters, and funders and donors who are investing in local, regional, and national movement-building infrastructure—WOL captured key trends and recommendations from "major racial crisis trigger moments over the past three years."

In partnership with Movement NetLab, WOL began a case study about Charlottesville.



To read the full report and case study, visit www.movementmiccheck.org.

Late Milestones

In October 2018, Within Our Lifetime quickly mobilized in support of Leadership Council member Jarrod Schwartz. A group of anonymous parents had threatened a lawsuit if the Santa Barbara United School District didn't end its relationship with Just Communities, the nonprofit organization Jarrod helmed. Within a few days, WOL network members flooded the district with phone calls. As of this writing, the case is still in the courts.

In November 2018, WOL returned again to Facing Race, where Leadership Council members Chris Messinger and Mama Lila Cabbil presented on behalf of Movement Mic Check. They offered recommendations for rapid response to crises of racialized violence and inviting attendees to add to and improve the guide.

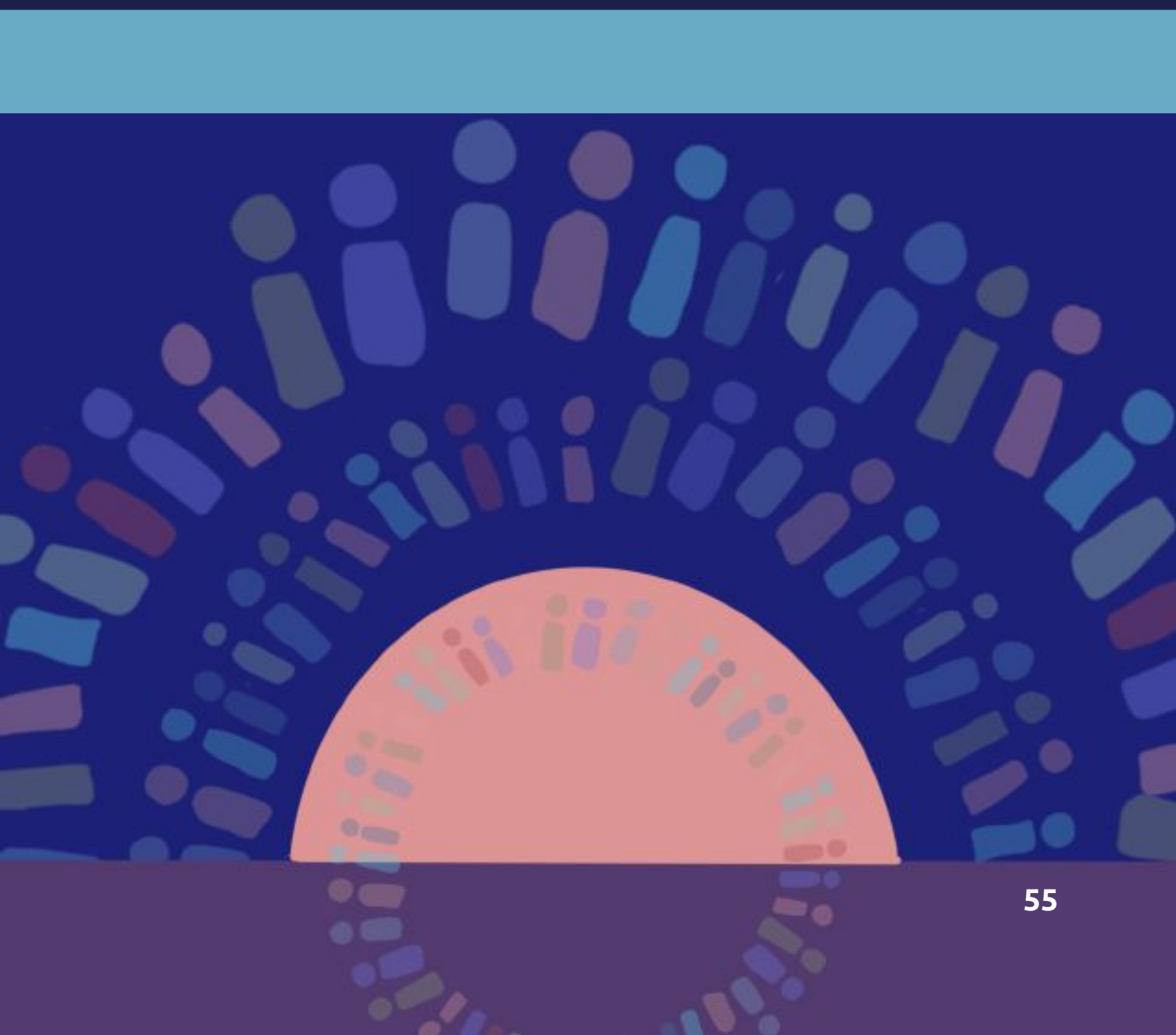


But WOL lost a lot of momentum after the Kellogg Foundation pulled funding. There was no longer a sustainable way to continue operating the national network. Work on Movement Mic Check and #DisruptPhilanthropyNOW! could and would continue without WOL. Kevin and Maggie, who had tried to recruit others to step up and take the lead, recognized that was time to move on.

In late 2018, the Leadership Council collectively decided to "sunset" Within Our Lifetime.

Late 2018: Letting Go

The gathered energy from the WOL network returned to the field of racial justice.



Closing the Network

In December 2018, WOL formally concluded its work and existence via an email to its 125+ members.



A sunset cake to mark the "sunset" of the WOL network.

In a closing survey, all members were invited to answer the question "What has been WOL's biggest impact?" Several named the Implicit Bias campaign. Others cited #DisruptPhilanthropyNOW and Movement Mic Check. But **the largest number of responses talked about the value of WOL's relationship building and national network.**

WOL members were also asked to "Imagine that five years from now, a group has come together to create a network to support the racial justice movement. What lessons would you share with them based on your experience with WOL?"

"Keep the structure as simple as possible. Funding should be good, but not essential, in doing your work. Relationships are key. And make sure that you weave love, laughter, and badass imagination into everything you do."

- Kevin John Fong, Closing Survey

A Poignant Transition



In March 2019, along with the city of Detroit and with civil rights veterans across the country, **Within Our Lifetime mourned the passing of Mama Lila Cabbil.**

Mama Lila Cabbil was President Emeritus of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute, a founding member of the Detroit People's Platform, an organizer during the water crisis in Flint and Detroit, and a Within Our Lifetime Leadership Council member. One WOL member wrote that she was "a fierce and brilliant community organizer with an amazing commitment to care for those around her, and an ever-expanding capacity to grow her circle of life."

REMEMBERING MAMA LILA CABBIL

The network collectively wrote: *Within Our Lifetime misses you, Mama Lila. Your legacy will live on. We are holding you close to our hearts and will continue to take action to end racism in our lifetimes.* They also collected and shared a few of Mama Lila's quotes:

- "We need to go from dialogue to action. When we do not take our conversations to action it is just idle conversation..."
- "How are our programs and services connected to policy? Policy is what brings about change, not service."
- "**Evaluation is for the funder.** It is not evaluating from the perspective of the people with the lived experience."
- "If you are doing your work without people with the lived experience, then my question to you is how are you accountable and how are you effective of being part of the movement?"

Some tributes from WOL members:

- "No matter what kind of day you were having, you were always there for others with a kind smile, a sparkle in your eye, and a flyer in your hand. I will miss you dearly..."

**"She never stopped. She never gave in.
She always lived in the space of vision and belief of what we
could be as a human race."**

- "Thank you for the way you loved on us, with kind words and hugs and cake and cards in that perfect handwriting. But also with truth-telling and call-ins and 'read this' and a clarity about justice and all the ways racism shows up."
- "I have too much gratitude for your love, mentorship, joy, truth, authenticity, honesty, kindness."

IN OUR OWN WORDS: WOL'S GREATEST IMPACT?

When asked years later to name WOL's biggest impact, Trish Tchume reflected:

"Many people will probably name the implicit bias work, and we definitely helped to raise visibility. We made it more of a common part of the conversations around racial justice, so that has been impactful. And the natural disaster framing for thinking about crises of racialized violence—which is totally out of the mind of Allen Kwabena Frimpong [see p. 53, Movement Mic Check]—is groundbreaking. But it's hard to assess its impact.

"To me, the work Maggie spearheaded to 'call in' philanthropy [might ripple the most]. There were two interconnected pieces:

"The first is **calling in foundations** to mirror their intentions with their practices.

"The second is **creating spaces** where people who work at nonprofits and grassroots groups [that rely on foundation dollars] could actually see that the experiences they were having were not normal and shouldn't be tolerated.

"Specifically, I'm remembering a working group call I was on with Maggie in late 2018. A woman came on who was from a tiny organization. She joined the call because she was, like, trying to learn how to BE: how to speak differently to funders so they would give her money. She thought we were offering a training call on that topic. We got to say, 'No. This space is for you.' This woman had been defunded by Kellogg for her racial justice work and she joined our call saying "I want to figure out how to change my language, how I talk about myself and my work. And even on that one call, we could say to this person, **'There is nothing different you should have to do in order to be funded to do the work you're doing to fight for racial justice – and the fact that this foundation did something to make you think you had to is entirely the problem.'** And creating spaces like that is a huge part of the impact of WOL."

IN OUR OWN WORDS: LESSONS FOR FUTURE ORGANIZERS

Susan Glisson, who sent the first email floating the idea of a network, offered: "I always think I don't pay enough attention to building one-on-one relationships with the folks that I'm gonna be working with. And that comes back to bite you later when you make assumptions, thinking that you're on the same page in terms of alignment of values and goals and the processes of getting to goals. So I would invest more time, I would ask people to invest more time in building those relationships." Susan loves adrienne maree brown's work. "I use her book a lot now, *Emergent Strategy*, [the idea that] when you get thoughtful people into a room and create a space for them, a container of trust for them to be able to share their hopes and fears and vulnerabilities, that something will emerge from that that you can't have predicted before the room. And so [my advice would be] to not be so outcome-focused – you know, that *we've got to accomplish this tangible goal*, [but instead] to set up a process that honors the humanifying process of this work, and trusting that good justice-minded work will emerge when we interact with each other in a new way that respects each other's humanity."

Roberta Avila, an original Leadership Council member, hoped that future groups will remember not to "reinvent the wheel. So much came out of the America Healing Conferences and the leadership of Dr. Christopher. Go back and look at that the conversation we had, draw on those resources...There are so many different ways to do this work. What we learned [from] Dr. Christopher is **every human being is sacred and holy**. We must remember that when we interact with others and remember it about ourselves."

"It's not just about the work we do, it's about how we do it. Show love and compassion for our colleagues and selves. Pay attention to the process. Make an effort not to railroad; try to make sure that in a space we are all in agreement. It takes a lot of thought and consideration to bring everyone on board."



(continued)

Leadership Council member **Carolyn Abdullah** would advise future organizers to ensure "explicit clarification of the goal and purpose. [There's a] need for some structure, some creative resource frame around the operation side of things. How can we create some sort of resource structure that's not dependent on an external foundation to exist to get the work done? I don't know if that's some creative financing – if organizations join, maybe each org puts in x amount of resources based on operating budget to support this network." She points out the burnout experienced by many core WOL leaders. **"People do have to live in society, they have their own individual needs and must support themselves.** [Maybe] create some sort of financing structure: when an org signs on, it commits to a financial contribution, each org has a sliding scale. We need something that's creative in that arena.

"I think opportunities to lay out early on a plan of action for each year, time to identify at least one concrete thing, we also need to think of assessing ourselves against what we want to achieve each year. What's the marker of success each year? [Having] some of those things in place might help people to come on board and know what's expected, how they fit, what they can offer. And then I don't know if we have a structure where the group sets it's own levels of accountability for itself, how do we hold each other accountable for our contributions within the network. How do we do that? **Making it OK to enter and exit**, so folks don't feel over-stressed or that if I do exit, it doesn't mean I'm a bad person. Open enough where you can enter and exit when you need to, and come back in when you need to.

"We may have different approaches, but in the end we care about making the world a better place. In organizations with hierarchies, stuff gets political, just like in other structures, large corporations. With the folks in WOL, **because we were not in the same organization, people were willing to change course, willing to listen.** It felt like it was apolitical."



Jeanné Lewis said that if another racial equity, justice, and healing network comes together, "it's critical that the people who are planning to lead this network invest the time in **strengthening their own relationships**, building trust, clarifying their joint vision. We didn't take the time to do that – that could be very powerful and critical. Other things can come [after]." She continued: "I appreciate Allen's [framing question]: Is WOL a network, organization, movement? We didn't have that clarity of that framework [earlier on]."

Chris Messinger believed that "our national network, which included reps from various organizations, fell short of the network theories and models that folks like SwarmLab described." But he saw power and potential in WOL's rapid response work, and above all, in the relationships it fostered. "It's rare to have relationships that are deep, connected, profound, and across the biggest dividing lines, especially when it comes to race. For the Leadership Council, those relationships have been developing and that's been really powerful. What has really emerged is that when people care about each other as humans, a benefit of those relationships is that we are able to support each other emotionally as we do the difficult work of racial justice."

Kevin John Fong continues to convene monthly calls with former members of the Leadership Council. WOL taught him "that healers need healing and that social justice warriors need healing spaces. That's it. We think we've gotta be tough and invincible. We need that healing time as well. The other takeaway is that **it's OK to let go**. Without any sense of blame or failure or this or that. Maggie's been doing this twice as long as I have, and Maggie and I came to this point [in late 2018], we kept inviting people into the core team, and there's no blame and no shame, it just never worked. And at some point we decided to draw the line: we said 'At the end of the year, we are stepping down, and if no one steps in, we will sunset. We'll give you a month to think about it.' And we could have looked at it as a failure. And I don't and I don't think Maggie does either. We've done the work, and it is now time to either pause or close it. The form doesn't matter at the end of the day. It's about the relationships."

FURTHER READING + IMAGE CREDITS

Learn more about WOL's work at www.disruptphilanthropy.org.

Photographs used throughout this document were taken and archived by various WOL members between 2011-2018. Special thanks and credit to Leadership Council Member and photographer Al White for many of the photographs from the early years.

Report written by Julia Smith with WOL Leadership Council members.

Custom illustrations by Megan J. Smith: www.repealhydeartproject.org.

