



## 2019 Year in Review 2020 Plans



It's such a joy to be in a movement vehicle that is committed to constant evolution. Sometimes its difficult to keep up with sharing our work with our community - and we want to get better at that! In service of sharing more, we're going to release an "annual report" every Winter/Spring that offers a review of of the previous year's programming, some detailed lessons for practitioners, updated language and refinement of our sense of purpose, and our plans for 2020. It's much more detailed than a typical annual report, and honestly, no one has ever asked us for an annual report, so we're going to include what we think matters here. We'd love your feedback at [info@wildfireproject.org](mailto:info@wildfireproject.org).

With relentless love, power and purpose,

- Joshua Kahn Russell, Executive Director, The Wildfire Project, February 2020

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**“Wildfire is a blessing for activists, organizations and movements! One of the best decisions we’ve made is to work with Wildfire over the last year. They created a sacred space for us to speak our truths and listen to one another, which strengthened our internal and external communication and work in the world. And recently, when we were overwhelmed responding to the fires in the Amazon, they held much-needed space for us to come together as a team to respond with big vision for the immediate and long-term. In a few hours we gained clarity for what we needed to do. For that, we are so grateful!”**



**- Leila Salazar-López, Executive Director, Amazon Watch**

# Wildfire

The Wildfire Project is a team of skilled facilitators who come out of a range of social movements. We support social movement groups to align the culture they practice with the values they hold, transforming self-limiting beliefs and barriers in the process. We do it in service of helping organizations **win** – setting bold goals and achieving them **with relentless strategy and love**.

## Our Purpose

Healthy groups form the core of successful movements. The Wildfire Project strengthens social movements across sector by supporting grassroots groups to transform and spread a thriving culture: groups resilient in the face of changing terrain, who know how to strategize, are grounded in history and their vision, have a connection to a “north star” bigger than themselves, have healthy internal practices, know how to build across identity, can lean into generative conflict, are rooted in compassion and gratitude, can navigate contradiction, and are prepared to grow and win material gains toward freedom.

## Why?

The systems that support life on this planet are in free-fall or collapse.

Many of the challenges we face are outside of our control, but there are key obstacles that are within our power to overcome. One of the core challenges activist groups face today is a dominant culture in our movements that is a barrier to effectively building power, growing, and winning. It keeps Left from being accessible and compelling. This ‘toxic movement culture’ manifests in activists staying stuck in a self-marginalizing stance, unproductive/unskilled orientation to conflict, burnout, lack of vision, the circular firing squads of “call-out culture”, and reductive approaches to identity. This is the water that many groups swim in, even when they themselves feel called to practice values that reflect their highest selves.

We know groups are the fundamental building block of movements – they’re what keep individuals in action, what keep movement moments going, how we transform, where we learn, what we use to hold each other accountable as we build networks.

We are in a historic moment of both incredible challenge and enormous possibility: the rules of the game are changing, and contradictions are heightening. If we don’t get more powerful soon, the rising tide of scarcity and fascism may engulf us all; if we do, true liberatory transformation of this world is on the table. Ultimately, in order for our movement to become what we need it to be, we need to shift its culture, toward one of powerful groups that can win in real terms.

In this regard, Wildfire is supporting the practice of the spiritual and cultural dimensions of a Just Transition.



## [Movement-building strategy](#)

We live in a collapsing civilization, and social movements are our best hope. Because we believe in groups, Wildfire's strategy is to work with grassroots organizations at the leading edge of a range of movement sectors, primarily those on the frontlines. We offer a special focus on groups that have emerged out of crisis moments. These are the groups that are most responsive to shifting context, adaptation, learning, and have the insight necessary to innovate solutions based on their social location. They offer the leadership that filters across movements and into our society at large. By assisting fundamental transformation in these groups, and then linking them together across issue areas, Wildfire contributes to a resurgence of a healing Left that can take on new challenges in a changing world. Our commitment to cadre and leadership development also transcends any particular group. We invest in the development of individual grassroots leaders within and beyond our partner groups because we know that by building their commitment to the long-haul, they will continue to assist our movements transformation long after our programs end.

## [How We Move](#)

The Wildfire Project is committed to keeping the real big picture in mind, drawing on deeper sources of resiliency bigger than ourselves, sitting in contradiction, honoring multiple truths, practicing gratitude, feeling visions of Freedom in our bodies, honoring land, and weaving the relations of material interdependence.

## [Our Programs](#)

Our work is relational. Our core programs are year-long Partnerships that take grassroots movement groups through creative, experiential, multi-part processes that help them shift their own group cultures through cycles of practice. This includes moving through generative conflict; grounding the work in study, history, and political education; navigating power, rank, and leadership; breaking past the self-limiting barriers that emerge from trauma and repression; building concrete strategy and organizing skills; finding balance between purpose & belonging; assisting interpersonal transformation, and building cultures of curiosity & learning.

We also offer group facilitation on a shorter-term basis, including coalition meetings, conflict and crisis interventions, retreats, fellowships, convenings, trainings and more. Additionally, we run long-term leadership development programs to advance the facilitation skills of grassroots change-agents.

Our programs prepare these groups, and individuals within them, to lead grassroots social movements toward their own potential – to help us all become become big, bold, visionary, and strategic enough to build the world we all deserve.

We use experiential, democratic tools to elicit the wisdom already present in the groups, and pair that with decades of expertise to support groups and individuals to become their most powerful selves.



## Program Areas

- 1) **Partner Programs:** Year-long multi-part retreat series with whole organizations.
- 2) **Custom Group Facilitation:** Facilitated processes with organizations on a short term basis, including coalition meetings, retreats, convenings, conflict mediation, and issue-area trainings.
- 3) **Cross-Movement Facilitation:** Facilitated processes with individuals across groups and movements coming together to do something short-term, such as convenings.
- 4) **Movement Culture Shift:** Programs in which Wildfire team members engage in culture-shift outside of facilitation work, such as seeding Freedom Songs, podcast interviews, and sharing lessons with other practitioners.
- 5) **Leadership Development:** Our Regenerative Facilitation Programs reflect Wildfire's deep, long-term engagement with movement leaders meant to develop their leadership in the realm of movement culture-shifting, including fellowships and developing our 18 person facilitation team in which we train folks to be Wildfire facilitators.

## Program Outcomes

After going through our programs, groups and individuals will:

- More effectively build power and grow
- Be more willing and able to defy “purity politics” by navigating contradiction, holding nuance, nurturing creativity, and taking risks
- Have the tools and skills to make strategic cultural interventions
- See themselves as creators/shapers/agents of culture
- Be able to identify and transform self-marginalizing group behavior
- Break past fear of conflict, and engage in healthy practices to surface agreements and disagreements
- Heal from organizational wounds that have lived under the surface and hindered their work
- See and transform the “ghosts” of unhealthy or unresolved past conflicts
- Know how to facilitate their wider base through comparable processes



## Six Elements of Thriving Movement Culture

Wildfire’s methodology was developed through years of letting the work teach us through praxis. We’ve found patterns that hold groups back, and an approach to assist organizations in shifting the culture they practice. We design custom programs from scratch to serve the needs of grassroots groups, using experiential, directly-democratic, participant-centered pedagogy. There are six elements that inform our methodology:

### **1. Thriving Groups**

- a. Enter into generative conflict. Balance purpose and belonging. Navigate rank. Practice direct feedback and accountability. Balance joining and differentiating. Build group containers that hold risk. Navigate mainstreams and margins.

### **2. Compelling Visions of Freedom**

- a. Find a North Star. Deepen collective vision. Engage in visionary political education. Assess strategies, impacts, and interpersonal dynamics.

### **3. Building Power Across Difference**

- a. Re-negotiate mainstreams and margins. Hold complexity, fierceness, and compassion. Deepen solidarity through political education.

### **4. Study and Practice**

- a. Historically ground the work. Deepen analysis of power. Concretize vision. Draw on strategic wisdom. Integrate political education.

### **5. Transformative Strategies & Skills to Strategize**

- a. Face and transcend self-limiting beliefs. Create a culture of assessment. Identify the impact you’re best suited to make. Build strategies to make that impact. Develop the skills that the work requires.

### **6. Cultivating Spirit and Faith**

- a. Develop and incorporate ritual. Increase capacity to sit in contradiction. Cultivate capacity to surrender. Keep the real big picture in mind. Draw on untapped resources and sources of resilience. Feel visions of freedom. Practice Gratitude. Increase a sense of interdependence.

“It was in a Wildfire space that I gained my power back. I really admire Wildfire for embodying the deep recognition that strategy comes from assessment, from conflict, from a willingness to be transformed alongside your comrades. Six years from now when the Dream Defenders end youth arrests in the state of Florida, and in 25 when we end the prison industrial complex, Wildfire’s imprint will be all over it – it will be all over this movement in general. They are transforming individuals in the service of the work and I am forever grateful. It changed my life, and it set the Dream Defenders on a trajectory for a successful future.”



- Rachel Gilmer, Co-Director, The Dream Defenders

## What's Special about Wildfire

Wildfire is an intervention on the dominant *culture* of activism in our society. We make this intervention with a team of facilitators who have the legitimacy, cultural competency, reputation, and stake to holistically engage across many movement sectors and challenge norms that activists take for granted. We believe that culture - *collective practices that express collective values* - sits underneath and shapes the structure, work, and impact of organizations.

### Whole Group Centered

There are many training organizations that host workshops for individuals. That model can train people in skills or new perspectives, but they often go back to organizations that are not able to integrate the skills or sustain the change. This leads to burnout and lost potential. We work with whole groups both as a core strategy for movement-wide culture shift, and also because its how to make the change stick. We insist that our Partners have full participation at all levels of leadership, for a cohesive impact.

### Practice-Oriented Accompaniment

Many workshops can create a feeling of breakthrough and catharsis in the training room, but that’s the easy part. Real change happens in the day-do-day, which is why Wildfire focuses on daily practice, which can only be tracked and supported through long-term accompaniment. That’s why our Partner programs follow the course of a year, rather than just a weekend.

### Experiential Methodology

Our pedagogy elicits the group’s own wisdom and direction - there are many trainings where experts communicate their expertise, but this style often does not bring about transformation or retention. We work experientially so that groups can sustain their growth without needing Wildfire, creating self-replicating patterns of behavior that can spread throughout our movements as a whole. The life of the group itself becomes the material of our facilitation, which is why all of our programs are custom-built to suit specific needs. We apply a range of tools through a refined methodology, rather than a cookie-cutter curriculum.

### Holistic integration

Most existing training infrastructure in the Left either sits in the realm of depoliticized skill building (i.e. without context), or conversely, focuses on political education and a liberatory politic that isn’t connected to building the capacity needed to carry it out. Wildfire is a holistic integration that blends these approaches - organizing, healing, strategy, education - underpinned by deep emotional work that focuses on recovering individual and collective agency. We do this by surfacing the dynamics that live under the surface in an organization.

## Multi-sectoral

Wildfire has praxis integrated into our DNA - our facilitators are always in the field, working in Ecological & Climate Justice, Black Liberation, Racial & Economic Justice, Immigrant Rights, Housing, and GLBTQI rights. We are students of the groups and sectors we serve, and therefore get to blend learning from the leading edge of frontline grassroots groups across these sectors. We believe movements need to break past issue silos to build strategies of deep alignment and cohesive platforms, which is why we internally have a cadre model where our facilitators are themselves practitioners in these different arenas.

## Shifting Culture Through Conflict

We've learned through practice that culture shift requires focusing on where the spoken and unspoken **tension** is - eliciting conflict to work through it in a generative way. For example, the barriers to good strategy are often not a lack of a planning rubric, but the micro-misalignment that manifests in practices that can be invisible to a group because it's the water they swim in. Without dealing with self-marginalizing group tendencies, a group can't grow. Without dealing intentionally with issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality, they'll never have enough unity to overcome external challenges. Many groups try to shift their structure, but without a culture to support that shift, the old patterns to persist. To win, we will need to shift the way we organize, *the way we behave*.

We believe the engine of this kind of shift is *healthy conflict*. Movement groups are often accustomed to the kinds of polarizing conflict that they practice externally with their adversaries; when they apply these practices to navigate internal disagreements among allies, it can fracture the group and become toxic - which is why many groups opt instead for passive-aggressive or conflict-averse internal dynamics. We believe that increasing the *conflict literacy* of groups is key for them to recover their power and grow.

Ultimately, that's what Wildfire is here for: To support individuals and groups to find their **agency**, so they can overcome their barriers to power and create the kind of culture that will help our movements grow and succeed, so we can win the world we all deserve.

## Wildfire's Track Record



The groups we've trained have won ballot measures to re-enfranchise hundreds of thousands of voters, gotten progressive candidates elected, escalated bold actions at the United Nations Climate Negotiations, shut down police precincts, saved homeowners from eviction, extracted millions of dollars from slumlords for low-income tenants, sued the federal government over climate change, won \$15/hr minimum wage in Minnesota, forced universities to divest hundreds of millions of dollars from fossil fuels and put it back in communities, defended the rights of Muslims and Jews, and organized thousands of people into power-building organizations. We don't claim responsibility for all of that. But we know we've helped individuals become better leaders, supported groups to meet their potential, and built relationships across geographies, identities, and issues that have manifested themselves in real action and tangible victories.

The groups we serve are changing the world.

We're so grateful to accompany and learn from them.



## The Wildfire Project Facilitation Team



Wildfire has a team of 18 experienced facilitators, all of whom are leaders in a wide range of movement sectors and issue areas. They include Executive Directors of organizations like the Dream Defenders, are Campaign Managers for Congressional leaders like Ilhan Omar, are Political Directors for groups like OutFront! Minnesota. Many of these practitioner-facilitators emerged from the organizations we've partnered with, and now make up our Leadership Team - which is one way that Wildfire is led by its grassroots base. This team keeps us rooted in many different movement arenas, allowing us to cross-pollinate cutting edge innovation and insights from different social change efforts across the country. We are proud that our team is active in the movements they serve on the ground, and distilling these insights allows us to be uniquely multi-sectoral.

**“After one of our retreats with Wildfire, I had this feeling in my body of absolute openness, clarity about who we were, and confidence in the possibility of who we could become. It felt a little bit like magic. I think that magic Wildfire brought actually helped our organization survive difficult times – but beyond surviving, to do important, powerful work – like this past semester, when we organized actions in 30 college campuses around the country, turning out more than 2,000 students, taking 60 arrests, and winning tangible victories for divestment from fossil fuels and reinvestment in a just transition. I strongly believe that Wildfire is a lot of what made that possible.”**



**- Varshini Prakash, co-Founder, Sunrise Movement**

## Partnerships



### 2019 Accomplishments & Evaluation

In 2019 Wildfire met our expanded Partnership goals by facilitating 8 organizations through year-long three part mutli-retreat series' that included coaching and practice plans in between workshops. In the process, we've deepened our methodology (see more of this in lessons on page 22). Our core pedagogical focus has been supporting Generative Conflict, and holding groups through transformational processes overcoming the self-limiting beliefs that emerge from the trauma of frontline work. Here is one example of a [Conflict Culture Assessment tool](#)<sup>1</sup> that we've developed this year to support groups diagnosing their own culture.

Our rigorous "Learning Arc" process helped us measure our impact qualitatively through cycles of feedback from our partners, which in turn helped us revise our methodology. This praxis process ensures Wildfire learns from our successes, challenges and mistakes and is why our Partnerships are both our most significant contribution to social moments, and the best learning laboratory for how real transformation happens. It's why we are so confident in our evolving model.

This year we invested heavily in the Climate Justice sector specifically - serving Environmental, Indigenous, EJ, land-based groups. We also ventured across the ocean to support the Pacific Climate Warriors council of Elders in Fiji, & El Departamento De La Comida in Puerto Rico.

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<sup>1</sup> If the hyperlink does not work, you can reach this document at:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1f1D\\_dmpDdBLWVkmSosUswF87x8N5DRWUpMSBvedBGg/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1f1D_dmpDdBLWVkmSosUswF87x8N5DRWUpMSBvedBGg/edit)

Our 2019 Partnerships included:

- **Pacific Climate Warriors**
  - The Pacific Climate Warriors are an alliance from 13 different islands who are on the frontlines of climate change and sea level rise.
  
- **El Departamento De La Comida**
  - El Departamento De La Comida is a collective for sustainable, regenerative, and resilient food projects in Puerto Rico. Having taken many shapes over the years to support local farmers and food justice in Puerto Rico, they reopened in the wake of Hurricane Maria with a model regenerative farm project, kitchen, resource library, and more experiments to build up the local food economy and restore food cultures in Puerto Rico.
  
- **OPAL Environmental Justice**
  - OPAL (Organizing People, Activating Leaders) builds power for Environmental Justice and Civil Rights in their communities. Founded in 2006 by and for low income and people of color, OPAL is the grassroots-driven hub at the center of Oregon's movement for Environmental Justice. They develop community members' leadership skills, and motivate them to take action through campaigns, impact public processes, and win victories in policy and procedure to achieve a safe and healthy environment where they live, work, learn, play, and pray.
  
- **Power U Center for Social Change**
  - Power U works with Black and Brown highschool students in Miami Dade county developing their leadership in the struggle for racial and economic justice in the United States.
  
- **Black Love Resists in the Rust**
  - This Buffalo NY based organization works within four intersections: embodied leadership, transformative organizing, healing justice and political education, with campaigns to end state-sponsored violence; decrease police presence in neighborhoods, improve conditions at the county's holding center, reduce the police budget and state de-carceration policies.
  
- **Amazon Watch**
  - Amazon Watch organizes communities in the United States and in South America to defend Indigenous rights and sovereignty as a core strategy to protect the Amazon Rainforest and to curtail the influence of oil exploration, pipelines, and resource exploitation, particularly from corporations based in the US. In addition to our normal Partnership program, this year we supported AW with strategy sessions to navigate the increased visibility of the fires in the Amazon.

- **SustainUS**

- SustainUS is a US Youth Delegation to the United Nations, engages the UNFCCC for climate solutions, and has built a nationwide network of youth working on the Climate Crisis. This year they are sending an all-Indigenous delegation to the Conference of Parties at the UN.

- **MN 350**

- MN 350 builds the climate movement by inspiring Minnesotans to take collective action. They work on The Pipeline Resistance Campaign to stop the expansion of Enbridge's tar sands pipeline network, campaign against the Dakota Access Pipeline, and run a Clean Energy Campaign building grassroots support for state policies to move to renewable energy, create green jobs, and divest state pension funds from fossil fuels.

We evaluate our partnerships using a variety of tools that include 360 evaluations, frequent direct feedback circles, our Learning Arc process, and our Regenerative Facilitation Program arc, we ultimately measure our impact based on the goals we set with each Partner, and whether in accomplishing them, if the organization has made a larger impact in the world (see page 7 for examples).

**However, here's an additional clear indicator of success: nearly all of our 2019 Partners have chosen to extend their work with us into 2020!** Next year we will continue to work with:

- **Amazon Watch**
- **OPAL Environmental Justice**
- **El Departamento De La Comida**
- **SustainUS**
- **Power U Center for Social Change**

**“The Wildfire team supported members of our Council of Elders to tap into their agency and enhance their awareness of what motivates them to perform and act in accordance with our North Star. Their experience with facilitating diverse groups of people meant that collectively they had an intuitive understanding to tailor their facilitation, encouraging each of us to tap into our individual and collective agency. The team operates from a place of truth and respect,**



**which supported our ability to trust them and their ability to influence meaningful positive change in our group culture. I believe their investment in preparation made them effective in meeting new challenges, engaging the group in courageous conversations and supporting us with robust decision making. They were able to understand our diversity, range of complex ideas and stories, and synthesize these into constructive outcomes, focused discussions, and next steps. Their willingness to genuinely invest in and support the council of elders was such a gift and have strengthened the resolve of this group of people by building their capacity, and mutual understanding of each other.”**

**- Fenton Lutunatabua, Coordinator, Pacific Climate Warriors**

We are still in discussions about the possibility of doing ongoing work with both Black Love Resists in the Rust, as well as Pacific Climate Warriors.



## 2020 Plans

Wildfire plans to expand our work by bringing on a full new 2020 Partnership cohort, *in addition to continuing our work with the partners listed above.*

This year we will deepen our Climate Justice work by deepening our support for Indigenous organizations, in addition to expanding our work in LGBTQI, Immigrant Rights, Racial & Economic Justice, Asian American, and faith-based movements. We are currently in negotiation with all the groups below for our 2020 partner cohort, and expect to confirm at least 6 of them by the end of January:

- **Indigenous Climate Action:**

- The only Indigenous climate justice organization in Canada. ICA develops, inspires, and supports sovereign Indigenous-led climate action and strategies. They are guided by community and believe that the leadership of Indigenous peoples, as stewards, caretakers and protectors of the earth, is crucial to achieving a climate stable future for all.

- **Black Youth Project 100 (BYP 100):**

- A National, member-based organization of Black 18-35 year old activists and organizers, dedicated to creating justice and freedom for all Black people. BYP100 does this through building a network focused on transformative leadership development, direct action organizing, advocacy, and political education using a Black queer feminist lens..

- **18 Million Rising:**

- Bringing Asian American communities together online and offline to reimagine Asian American identity with nuance, specificity, and power.

- **Movimento Cosecha:**

- A nonviolent movement fighting for permanent protection, dignity, and respect for the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States.

- **OutFront! Minnesota**

- Creating a state where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are free to be who they are, love who they love, and live without fear of violence, harassment or discrimination.

- **Audre Lorde Project**

- A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Trans and Gender Non Conforming People of Color center for community organizing, focusing on the New York City area. Through mobilization, education and capacity-building, we work for community wellness and progressive social and economic justice. Committed to struggling across differences, we seek to responsibly reflect, represent and serve our various communities.

- **Nuns & Nones**

- An alliance of spiritually diverse millennials, women, religious, and key partners working to create a more just, equitable and loving world. Together, we are envisioning and creating new futures for the legacies and sacred spaces of religious and monastic life, in response to the social and environmental needs of our times.

In 2020, we will use the same qualitative evaluation metrics as in 2019.

## Custom Group Facilitation



## 2019 Accomplishments

In our proposal last year we set a goal of working with 7-9 additional groups on a Custom basis. **We more than tripled that number**, working with 24 groups to support strategic planning, leadership development, coalition planning, conflict mediation, and a range of other support. These groups included:

- **CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities**
- **Asian Pacific Islander Equality Northern California**
- **Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition**
- **Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)**
- **Seattle 350**
- **Sierra Club Training Team**
- **Green Worker Cooperatives**
- **Momentum**
- **Color of Change**
- **Black Mama's Bailout**
- **Artists Thrive**
- **Arab American Association of New York**
- **Sunrise Movement**
- **Youth Empowered Action Camp**
- **Rainforest Action Network**
- **Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative**

We evaluate each program using the same success indicators outlined in our partnerships above. We also take it as a quantitative success indicator that so many groups we work with are recommending us to their peers, and continuing additional programs. We were able to sustain this huge spike in custom work through the commitment of our team, but need support to continue it into 2020.



**“I highly recommend Wildfire. Training and facilitation custom-designed to your groups’ needs, run by highly skilled working organizers, is a whole different beast than other trainings.”**

**- Kevin Whelan, Co-Executive Director, MN 350**

## 2020 Plans:

Most of the groups above have already requested additional support in 2020. They include:

- **Sunrise Movement** (conflict mediation)
- **Rainforest Action Network** (racial justice alignment)
- **The Peace Poets** (deep facilitation)
- **Seattle 350** (strategy)
- **Momentum** (strategy)
- **Showing Up for Racial Justice** (conflict)
- **Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition** (gender)
- **Radical Hope: Florida's Grassroots Feminist Collaboration** (culture shift)
- **Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative** (retreat)
- **Green Workers Cooperatives** (retreat)
- **Green Thumb** (training for trainers)

Each year we've learned that setting numerical goals is less useful for this arena of programming, since we accept proposals for custom group work on a rolling basis and meet this need when capacity and resources allow. However, as it is an election year, we anticipate many groups within our network responding to unforeseen and urgent twists in the landscape. We need Overbrook's help to be able to resource this responsiveness.

Wildfire has also decided that 2020 is the year to begin to re-engage public programming, in order to spread our tools and expand our capacity. To help reach that goal, we're currently designing a **Training for Trainers** that will be open to select leaders from the groups we serve. While our team is still mapping out this project, we've gotten an enthusiastic response from our Partners.



**“The Wildfire Project changed my life. It is part of the reason I have been able to step into action and continue to grow. Wildfire opened my heart and mind to my power.”**

**- Lena Gardner, Black Lives Matter**



# Movement Culture Shift: Communications

## 2019 Accomplishments:

### **Branding & Strategy:**

In 2019 we worked with Resource Media to do our first complete 360 evaluation of our brand and reputation.

Overbrook participated in this process - thank you!

Resource media interviewed and surveyed:

- Our organizational partners
- Past groups we've worked with
- Past participants in our public convenings
- Funders (foundations)
- Donors (individuals)
- Board members
- Facilitation Team members
- Ally organizations
- Peers in our field



We used this report to inform the design of our 2020 strategic re-visioning process (see page 20), clarify our sectoral strategy, tweak our Regenerative Facilitation Program, update branding and language for our new website, and decide *not* to change our name.

### **Communications:**

We also accomplished our goals set out to begin to articulate our lessons and tools publicly. This included:

- An entirely new website! Check it out: [www.WildfireProject.org](http://www.WildfireProject.org)
- A series of interviews and podcast appearances on For The Wild, The Bitchuation Room, and The Michael Brooks Show.
- Recordings of freedom songs (which can be heard at [WildfireProject.org/media](http://WildfireProject.org/media))
- Publishing our Six Elements Framework
- Speaking on panels, such as the Conflict Transformation Panel at the CHANGE Unity Summit
- Presenting at various gatherings, including the Momentum convening on Movement Culture.
- Public tools such as the [Conflict Culture Assessment](#) shared above.

## 2020 Plans:

### **Our Own Podcast!**

- Our biggest new project is a Podcast Series partnering with **Irresistible Podcast** (formerly known as Healing Justice Podcast). The Wildfire Project will be hosting a series of *5 episodes* for Healing Justice Podcast's large audience, exploring key movement tensions, conflicts, and fault lines. We will both share our analysis and interview our Partners to illuminate key lessons.

We also plan to continue our trajectory of public work, including:

- Publishing an annual "Lessons from Practice" document
- Articles on conflict from our team
- More practices and tools



**“Since joining the Climate movement I have been a participant in many training programs but I have never walked away so empowered like I have with the Wildfire project. Their ability to be flexible and adjust their program according to how the group works was definitely something I admired about these facilitators. They come with so much knowledge and experience but they entered our spaces first with openness, heart and humility. I felt safe and comfortable to step into vulnerability with Wildfire, and for that I would not have been able to fully see and appreciate my growth in this journey. Our team was strengthened by moments like these and we achieved clearer goals, a plan for longevity and so much hope for the future ahead. And can I add that we had so much fun!”**

**- Jacynta L Fa'amau, Council of Elders, Pacific Climate Warriors**

## Leadership Development: Regenerative Facilitation Program



### 2019 Accomplishments

Leadership development is core to Wildfire's orientation to movement building inside and outside of our organization. This year we continued our ongoing Regenerative Facilitation Program.

#### **Retreat Series**

In 2019 convened our 18 person facilitation team twice to gather, deepen our skills around facilitating groups into agency, facing self-limiting beliefs, and engage conflict. We walked our talk by applying our tools on ourselves, deepening alignment, restructuring governance, and engaging in group study. Rigorous with our praxis, we did deep-dives into our lessons from the field, sharing insights across movement sectors.

We built mechanisms of feedback and support, and systematized our curriculum, adding dozens of new facilitation tools to our toolbox with an innovative system for retreat design customization.

This year, the program featured a new key Training for Trainers:

- Our team participated in a 5 day "Transformational" training in Philadelphia, led by Training for Change, to skill up the sophistication of the emotional / trauma work we do with groups.

In 2020 we plan to continue our successful model, convening this team twice more.

## Organizational Development:

### 2019 Staffing:

We grew!

In 2019 we went from the equivalent of 2 full time positions, to 3 full time positions by expanding both Program Director and Operations Director roles from half-time to full time.

Our current staff includes:

- **Joshua Kahn Russell:** Executive Director, full time
- **Lisa Juacon:** Operations Director, full time
- **Michael Strom:** Program Director, full time

In June of 2019 BJ Star transitioned out of Operations Director role, and remains a lead facilitator on our team. BJ was replaced by Lisa Juachon:



Lisa hails from Ohlone land - born in San Francisco and raised all over the Bay Area - and currently lives in Berkeley (Chochenyo Ohlone territory) with her beautiful family. She joined the Wildfire Project after returning to her ancestral lands in the Philippines where she worked on a natural farm and cafe. As the freshest ingredient of our team, she brings an exciting and welcomed perspective rooted in liberation, food and environmental justice, and cultural reclamation. We are blessed to have Lisa's leadership and operational mastery in this time of evolution.

### 2020 Staffing:

Realtalk: We are very clear that Wildfire will need to hire more staff in order to meet the demand for our work. We're currently debating whether the next role will be a Development Director or an Education Director, and if we'll be able to do it in 2020, or have to wait until 2021.

Our baseline 2020 budget does not include hiring for this year, since we have some ambitious programmatic goals to meet first, and some of our funders have shifted their grantmaking cycles to the springtime. However, we plan to do a 6 month budget evaluation to see if we can elevate our goals to hire a new position by the end of the year.

## 2019 Advisory board additions:



Because The Wildfire Project is increasing the volume of our Indigenous support work, we have formally brought on our mentor Clayton Thomas Muller to help build out our cultural competency in a clear, responsible, and visionary way.

Clayton is a member of the Treaty #6 based Mathias Colomb Cree First Nation, also known as Pukatawagan, located in Northern Manitoba, Canada. For the last twelve years he has campaigned across Canada, Alaska and the lower 48 states organizing in hundreds of First Nations, Alaska Native and Native American communities in support of grassroots Indigenous Peoples to defend against the encroachment of the fossil fuel industry.

This has included a special focus on the sprawling infrastructure of pipelines, refineries and extraction associated with the Canadian tar sands. Currently, Clayton is the 'Stop It At The Source' Campaigner with 350 as well as a founder and organizer with Defenders of the Land.

Clayton is an OG and we're so grateful to have his guidance as we continue to grow!



**“At a time of serial economic and ecological crises, Wildfire is giving our movements crucial tools and structures to protect themselves — to not only fight back disaster capitalism but to put forward real solutions that reduce inequality and make us all safer in the future. I don't know of anything else out there like it.”**

**- Naomi Klein, Author, Wildfire Project Advisory Board Member**

## 2020 Strategy Process:

*We're ready to take another step forward!*

Since 2013, The Wildfire Project has been supporting frontline grassroots social movement organizations with holistic transformational facilitation. In our first few years, we were letting the work itself teach us. Over time, we began to notice patterns in what holds groups back from their power, and this led us into a strategic revision process from 2015-2017. The outcome of this process was a refined sense of our mission and North Star: shifting “toxic movement culture” in the Left toward a resilient one rooted in six elements of “thriving movement culture”. We knew that group facilitation was our strength and chose to spend a few years refining our facilitation methodology through the lens of culture shift. We knew this was *one step* - we have now reached the point in this process where we are ready for the next step, further refinement of this North Star to help us clarify what's next for us.

We define “North Star” work to be a mixture of what others often call *vision* and *statement of purpose*. We're ready to get clearer on our big-picture goals and larger strategy for achieving it. We recognize that group facilitation alone will not bring about the scale of culture shift our movements need and are now ready

to take the next step in evolving a strategy that brings this mission beyond a yearly cohort of group facilitation. We've come to a lot of clarity about how to shift the cultures of individual organizations, and developed some analysis about the hegemonic patterns they reflect in our movements. Now we're sitting in a number of questions about what culture shift looks like beyond that, such as:

- Are we pegging our outcomes to the material gains that our partners make via their organizing as a result of our work? Or are we pegging our outcomes to "culture shift" in itself (and if so, how do we measure that)?
- What's the broader culture we're looking to shift? The cultures of social movements? Or some aspect of the culture of our country more broadly?
- What parts of our methodology and definition of culture hold up when we're working at that larger scale? What will we need to shift and innovate to make a larger scale intervention (and do we want that)?

This next step will include a further refinement/defining of our "no" (toxic movement culture, as well as our "yes" (thriving movement culture, as described in the six elements above). It will require political education, debate, and alignment of our team, as well as consultation with key stakeholders in our work, as well as revising our metrics for evaluating our work. We will be convening the leadership of our team as well as other stakeholders in our ecosystem into a "strategy team" which will have multiple retreats in 2020.

As professional facilitators, we understand the value of having outside support. We hired Kiran Nigham to help facilitate us through this process. The outcomes will include:

- Clear Vision & Statement of Purpose (aka "North Star")
- Clear Theory of Change to reach our purpose
- Alignment within the Wildfire Team on the above vision, purpose, and theory of change
- Process for measuring our impact / indicators of success

# 2019 Lessons, Reflections, and Mistakes

## Some Lessons on Conflict

This year we committed ourselves to raising our game in sophistication around Conflict Transformation. Here are some of the lessons we generated from surprises in walking our talk on Conflict:

Conflict is a part of any relationship. It's not something we can make disappear or deal with just once. When we get into *right relationship* with conflict, it becomes a vital driver of connection, growth, and building collective power.

Knowing how to be in generative conflict is essential to the success of any of the work we're doing.

When we say "generative conflict", we mean conflict that generates more possibilities, greater connection, and fuller expression, instead of shutting those things down. This *doesn't* mean that everything feels good.

On both the individual and collective level, conflict and tension point us to where we need to grow. They often shows us where we're stuck in limiting patterns and beliefs. When we know how to listen, conflict and tension can be a way that wisdom of the collective body reveals itself. One metaphor is that conflict is to the collective body what pain is to the individual body. It points us toward collective wounds, places that need our attention.

From this perspective, conflict and tension can become an opportunity to step into our most powerful selves, build our capacity for compassion, interdependence, and connection, move beyond either/or thinking and let multiple truths co-exist. Conflict and tension become an opportunity get in right relationship with ourselves and each other.

### 1. Building a Culture of Generative Conflict

Our goal in facilitating conflict work is not just resolving specific conflicts, but rather building groups' long-term capacity for generative conflict more broadly.

When groups come to us to begin a program, many of them are already in the midst of some kind of conflict or tension. We support them to surface and work through those tensions, but we see this as only part of the work. Most of the work of building a culture of generative conflict happens before, after, and between acute moments of tension.

#### After a conflict has cooled down

Sometimes, as a conflict peaks and begins to cool down, we experience a catharsis that settles into a sense of connection, relief, and openness. It's easy to take this to mean the conflict is over. Other times, the conflict peaks but doesn't quite settle or resolve, and we're left sitting in the agitational discomfort of something unfinished.

In both situations, there's still important work to do.

## 1. Taking time to reflect and make meaning of what just happened.

- “We can tolerate this.” A lot of conflict avoidance is driven by a fear that if we really “go there,” something will break or we’ll fall apart. After high tension moments in our programs, we often reflect back to groups that they said hard things, and everything turned out okay. Even when the conflict is not resolved, there’s usually something grounding that comes from collective silence being broken and everything being put on the table. Building the *felt capacity* that we can handle difficult conversations and strong emotions is a core part of generative conflict culture.
- Conflict will happen again. So what are we going to do about that? How do we accept and integrate that reality? What did we learn as individuals and a group about how to be in conflict well?
- We’re walking a path. Building a generative conflict culture in an organization is a long-term trajectory. What needs to shift about this group/relationship based on what we learned? What are our next steps toward becoming a group that relates to conflict powerfully?

## 2. Making commitments

- What needs to shift? What are the commitments that this conflict asks us to make? Did people share hurt that needs to be tended to? Were harmful or limiting patterns revealed that need to shift? Make a plan for applying what you learned in the conflict.
- Timeline & Follow-through. Make a timeline for those commitments. How and when will you follow-up on your commitments. What happens if someone doesn’t fulfill a commitment? What are the ways you might struggle with your commitments?

## Before the next conflict heats up

We’ve encountered several key factors that shape a groups’ ability to hold conflict well. Building these things into group culture takes time outside the heat of conflict. Here’s our still-growing list:

Pace	Moving a pace that makes time to build a positive group dynamic and leaves space for the unexpected and emergent.  <i>When we’re moving too fast, we often sacrifice time to reflect, maintain our relationships, give each other feedback, and release pressure. When these things are suppressed, they can end up erupting as conflicts. And then, because we’re already sprinting, the conflicts feel like major derailments. Everything becomes pressurized and orients around outcomes at the expense of relationships.</i>
Feedback	Space not only to give regular, honest feedback, but to process, integrate, and follow up on that feedback.
Accountability Practices	Clear practices for holding each other accountable to commitments and expectations, rooted in shared values.
Reflection & Assessment	Time to pause, reflect, and realign on what’s working and what needs to improve.



<p>Requests &amp; Boundaries</p>	<p>The ability to make clear requests of each other and both say and receive a clear “yes,” “no,” or “maybe.” This applies at both the individual and organizational level.</p> <p><i>Grounded requests and boundaries can be surprisingly difficult. We can default to a number of patterns:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Requests: expecting people to know what we want without us asking; making requests indirectly or not at all; demanding instead of requesting; indicating that there will be consequences if our requests don’t get the response we want; struggling to negotiate around a “maybe”</i></li> <li>● <i>Boundaries: saying yes to everything to not disappoint anyone; standing in a default, rigid “no;” an inability to feel what we want enough to set a clear boundary; setting boundaries and then consistently backtracking; not setting boundaries and then feeling resentment later</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Undoing these patterns takes time, practice, and a collective/organizational commitment and encouragement. It also asks us to work on ourselves beyond our organizations (more below).</i></p>
<p>Cultivating Empathy &amp; Compassion</p>	<p>An ethic that values relationships, compassion, and openness to different perspectives. Put into practice in the ways a group holds members accountable, makes decisions, and builds relationships.</p>
<p>Personal Work</p>	<p>Encouragement, support, and expectations that group members walk a path of personal healing and growth beyond the work of the organization.</p> <p><i>The support part deserves a little more conversation. How can we not just talk about the importance of personal work but walk our talk? Does the group’s pace/workload leave time for personal work? Are people able to take time off to tend to themselves? Is it possible to offer financial or other material support to members’ personal healing and development? Could healing and personal development be integrated into programming?</i></p>
<p>Shared Purpose &amp; Strategic Alignment</p>	<p>Space to consistently realign and deepen a sense of shared purpose and strategy.</p> <p><i>A clear purpose becomes a metric for every part of our work--we can ask “Does this move us closer to our purpose or not?” In the absence of a clear purpose, we can wind up setting arbitrary goals and standards. We’ve seen a wide variety of conflicts--on workload, goals, decision-making, etc.--that were ultimately a result of not having a clear “why.” A moment of high tension is not the best place to renegotiate and clarify an organization’s purpose. We’re well served by prioritizing that work before the height of tension.</i></p>

Encouraging Generative Conflict	Having a clear, shared understanding of what makes conflict generative and talking about it as natural and necessary.
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## 2. In Conflict, Get Specific

We've seen many conflicts where tension is rising, but the actual substance of the conflict has never been openly addressed--sometimes because time hasn't been made, sometimes because people are avoiding it, sometimes because people don't have enough clarity. In these situations, we've learned that conflict is never generative when it's about something abstract or vague.

Sometimes, the specifics just need to be uncovered and engaged. Other times, the conflict is deeply rooted in a lack of clarity--we don't actually know what each side thinks. In those situations, the conflict is actually about what we're projecting onto each other. We have an idea about what someone else stands for that feels like a threat to what we stand for. This idea may or may not be grounded in reality, but it's remarkably easy to fall into the trap of letting things stay abstract and fighting past each other.

We're learning to get as grounded as possible as early as possible. Once we dig into specifics, the conflict gets traction and becomes real. In a case where the conflict has only existed in the abstract, space needs to be made for people to feel into and find their grounding. The conflict has to be expressed in order to be transformed.

## Some Lessons on Expectations & Accountability within Groups

Accountability has become a common theme in our programs (and within our own team challenges!)...specifically, accountability to group expectations, responsibilities, and commitments. Many of the groups we work with struggle when they need to respond to a plan breaking down, or to someone breaking their word.

*Groups are less resilient to shifting political terrain when they don't have the muscle-memory of accountability practices that work for their specific internal culture.*

Past unhealthy or exploitative experiences with accountability are often a driving factor in this difficulty. Many of us come to the work having been "held accountable" in families, work places, or broader communities in punitive, shaming ways that we never agreed to. In response, we might resist being held accountable in our organizations or fear that we're reenacting harmful patterns when we hold others accountable. It might feel like holding someone accountable risks breaking relationship and pushing them away. Or, it can feel like we can't tolerate the possibility that some people will be "in" and others "out" if we hold everyone accountable to expectations.

We've been experimenting with two key interventions on this pattern.

## 1. Distinguishing Between Healthy & Unhealthy Accountability

We need methodologies to explore our experiences of holding and being held accountable. We can then develop lenses to distinguish between what supported our growth and power, and what made us feel shamed, controlled, or isolated. *Then* we can begin to build a vision of accountability that aligns with our values and supports us to achieve our purpose.

Wildfire has supported groups to do this kind of reflection and align on qualities of healthy accountability vs. the qualities of unhealthy accountability. They often share some key themes:

### Qualities of Unhealthy Accountability

- Punitive; Driven by an explicit or implicit motivation to make someone hurt or “pay for what they’ve done”.
- Transactional; focused solely on product/outcome in a way that ignores circumstances that caused the breakdown and the work of maintaining relationships.
- Reactive; accountability only comes into play after someone has broken their word/acted out of integrity, with no support systems beforehand.
- Over-accountable (a term from Generative Somatics); sacrificing personal boundaries or looking to hide through appeasing.
- Under-accountable (also a term from Generative Somatics); avoiding, disappearing, becoming non-responsive, or shrinking away from accountability.

### Qualities of Healthy Accountability

- Consequences & impact over punishment; The goal is not to make someone hurt because they messed up, but to face the natural consequences required to repair impacts on the work and each other.
- “You did something bad” vs. “you are bad”; faces the impact of someone’s behavior without making them fundamentally wrong.
- Relational; about deepening relationships and growing in community, not just producing outcomes.
- Grounded in the wholeness, complexity, and context of each person’s life.
- Shared purpose & values; rooted in collective work to achieve the group’s purpose and live into shared values, not random, arbitrary, or bureaucratic rules or whims.
- Driven by curiosity over judgement.
- Good faith; cultivating and assuming good intentions.
- Long-term/over-time; a culture of practicing accountability consistently, not just after a breakdown, that includes clear process and expectations and ongoing follow up/follow through.
- Collective responsibility; every member of a group has a role in maintaining an accountable culture.

This alignment on the *values* that drive a group’s vision of accountability (particularly when rooted in reflection on group members’ own successes and struggles with accountability) often enables the group to release fear and

resistance that have been blocking them from building an accountable culture.

## [2. Reframing Accountability as a Path to Growth, Healing, & Purpose](#)

The above framing of healthy accountability allows us to enter into accountability in service of transforming our world and ourselves. Our thinking on accountability has been shaped by Transformative Justice movements led by women and trans people of color, Marxist practices of criticism/self-criticism/summation, and the organization Generative Somatics.

We know that, when it's done right, accountability offers individual opportunities to:

1. Let ourselves be *seen* and *related to* authentically, even and especially when we've made mistakes.
2. Build our capacity to trust ourselves and our relationships.
3. Be held to our purpose, values, and growing into who we long to become.

Similarly, healthy accountability offers groups opportunities to transform.

4. Every time a group breaks its word and doesn't address it, the group loses trust in itself. Practicing collective, healthy accountability can help a group move from doubt, shame, and avoidance to believing in itself. Sometimes we imagine that believing in the group is what drives action, that if the mission and vision are compelling enough, people will reliably participate. But it can actually work the other way around: when a group does what it says it will do, members often come to believe its vision and mission are possible and worthwhile.
5. Though many of us fear that holding each other accountable will break our relationships or make people leave, it often ends up bringing groups into deeper, more trusting and reliable relationship.
6. Healthy accountability helps a group become a place where its members can let themselves be seen, whole and complex. In the work of showing up accountably, we have to learn to really listen to ourselves, feel our boundaries, and communicate our needs. These are all things trauma and oppression work to take away from us. Accountability becomes a fundamental component of healing these wounds. It's an essential part of building groups where we transform ourselves as we work to transform the world.

# Finances

## Budget

In 2020 our annual projected budget is **\$556,000**

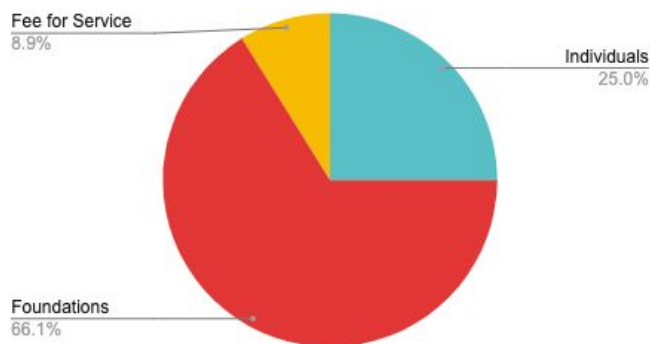
We've spent the last few years dramatically expanding our programming. We're proud that we've been able to do this at low cost, and have only needed to slightly increase our budget each year. We've been growing our income and costs responsibly. We've begun to build up an annual reserve to build in resiliency in the case of a coming recession. However now that our output is so outsized for our small team, we've realized that we need to turn attention to remunerating our team much more, we work too far under market rate, and that does not reflect our values. In addition to raising the pay of our team, this year we've taken on more partner programs than ever before, an additional \$25k strategy process, and new content creation like our podcast partnership. So we're taking a leap! It's our first year that we've set a budget with a deficit - we have an extra \$20k gap to make up to meet our baseline, and while we're not sure where it will specifically come from, we're embracing the abundance mindset with confidence that it will happen (cue the moment that you might want to go to [www.wildfireproject.org/donate](http://www.wildfireproject.org/donate) to help out ;).

Once we meet our baseline budget, we're taking aim at our next operational ambition - we need to hire another staff member in the next year. Our small-but-mighty 3 person staff, and 18 person team needs to grow to keep up with the requests coming in from the movements we serve. We hope to hire a 4th staff member in 2020-2021, and a 5th the following year in order to reach the ideal size for our current stage of development. We'll need to secure at least \$70k in dedicated annual recurring commitments for this.

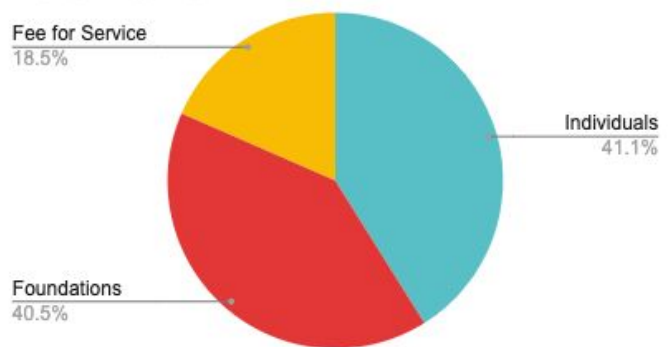
We have not designed our development strategy over the last few years in service of growth for its own sake. Instead, we've focused on diversifying our income streams, and balancing them so we can be resilient with an integrated model. We're especially proud of this shift, and want to share the charts below that illustrate how much we've been able to adjust even in the last two years.

## Where our money comes from:

2018 Income



2019 Income



**Thank you to our current foundation funders:**

We're so grateful to work with foundations who understand the value of multi-sectoral movement support work that nourishes grassroots organizations. We have long-term trusting relationships with our foundation funders and are grateful to maintain mostly General Operating support from them. As of February 2020, this year's funders include:

- **Conflict Transformation Fund**
- **Chorus Foundation**
- **Overbrook Foundation**
- **Bertha Foundation**
- **LUSH Charity Pot**
- **Arca Foundation**

**Gratitude**

We practice accountability to the groups we serve, to each other, and to spirit. We're grateful to all of you who keep it real with us, and help us learn and grow. Thanks for accompanying us on this journey of deepening our pedagogical skill set, growing the nuance of our politics, refining our methodology, helping us shed the limitations within the activist Left so we can support each other to be as powerful as our political moment demands.

