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Embracing Opportunities and Navigating Challenges: A Study of Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Progressive Advocacy Groups' Community Organizing Models

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Abstract

Community organizing is essential for building and sustaining collective community-based power to effect change, which is a core goal of progressive social change organizations. However, the characteristics and commonalities in community organizing approaches, and the tensions groups experience as they engage in organizing remain unclear. This paper sheds light on these questions by presenting findings from a survey about the experiences of 24 progressive social change groups that engage in community organizing across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. It synthesizes similarities and differences in diverse models of organizing practice and elevates challenges that arise from implementation. We begin by describing the organizing models currently in use, including predominant organizing frameworks, the range of local groups that are supported, the structures of these local groups, and the resources available to them. We found that organizations primarily used hybrid organizing models that combine locally-based relational practices with centralized professional skills. This combination of structure and approach sought to harness 'people power' to effect social change by mobilizing ever increasing numbers of supporters and leaders. This paper also examines the challenges that respondents faced in maintaining their organizing models, including 1) difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers and volunteer leaders, 2) balancing staff and volunteer autonomy and flexibility with organizational priorities and responsibilities, and 3) balancing the resource needs to employ staff to maintain these volunteers and the group's organizing model more generally. We conclude with reflections on the opportunities that innovative technologies and new organizing strategies present to progressive social change organizations.

Keywords: community organizing; progressive organizations; social change; Australia; Aotearoa New Zealand

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Introduction[1]

This paper examines the models and characteristics of community organizing undertaken by groups seeking social change in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. It explores how community organizing provides a structure for people to collectively recognize and address systemic issues impacting their daily lives (Christens, Gupta, and Speer 2021; Taylor and Wilson 2016), aiming to build both individual and collective capacity to champion the common good (Mihaylov 2021; Speer and Han 2018). Within the academic literature, community organizing is defined as the process of uniting individuals through a process that shifts their emotions from anger, isolation, and despair to collective action, promoting collective interests and improving the group's position (Divakaran and Nerbonne 2017; Van Zomeren and Iyer 2009; Wright, Taylor, and Moghaddam 1990). Organizing focuses on building individuals' capacity, skills and leadership to effect change, in contrast to mobilizing, which focuses more on increasing the participation in one-off and/or short term events such as petition signing and rallies (Divakaran and Nerbonne 2017; Tattersall 2020). In this sense, organizing can be understood as less transactional than mobilizing because it focuses on building long term capacity to engage in civic action (Han 2009). Regardless of whether groups engage in organizing or mobilizing, the nature of their activities are shaped by the particular political-economic context in which they take place, and thus may differ across countries and issues (DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2010).

With a global reach that includes Australia (Tattersall 2015), community organizing has been instrumental in driving change and expanding civic engagement opportunities, co-creating historical narratives, and reshaping understandings of power and injustice (Rogers, Mediratta, and Shah 2012; Subica et al. 2016; Cini 2023). Progressive organizations in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand have long utilized forms of community organizing as a 'means of challenging structural power' (DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2010, 171). Community organizing in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand first emerged in the 1990s through the Australian Council of Trade Unions, with a reemergence in the 2000s by climate and community groups informed by the work of Saul Alinsky and broad-based organizing such as the Industrial Areas Foundation (Tattersall 2020; Whelan and MacLeod 2016). While not necessarily linking these activities to particular community organizing structures, groups in these countries with their histories of colonial violence and robust protest traditions, have seen communities standing against corporate and state power abuses (MacLeod and Byrne 2012; Pyles 2009). Today there is no clear consensus on what community organizing is across these countries, with no existing mapping available on what organizing principles and structures are most common, nor what particular elements influence the choice of organizing models.

Progressive organizations dedicated to social and environmental change are widespread across both countries (Gulliver, Wibisono, and Louis 2022). Initially boosted by an investment in union organizing (Tattersall 2015), more recently a rapid growth of environmental groups mirrors increasing concerns regarding inadequate government responses to the climate crisis (Gulliver, Fielding, and Louis 2020; 2021). Research on community organizing in Oceania, though limited, reveals varied practices. Some studies have explored the history and practices of community organizing within a particular organization (such as the Sydney Alliance, see Tattersall 2015), or within social movements in the region (e.g., Whelan 2010). MacLeod and Brynes' (2012) case study on the Graceville community garden in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, explored how a group seeking to develop a community garden moved between community building to

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community organizing as political opposition forced a change in approach. Similarly, a comparative study of iwi (Tribal) led checkpoints in Te Araora, Aotearoa New Zealand by around 200 Kaumātua (Elders) initiated in response to the Covid pandemic explored the changing responses of power-holders to community organizing (Dutta, Elers, and Jayan 2020). Whether demanding *tino rangatiratanga* (community sovereignty) from a settler colonial state or shifting gear from a participatory neighborhood planning process to mobilization against an oppositional local councilor, both studies indicate that in Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand community organizing can and has evolved from 'gentle community building processes' to direct political engagement or even confrontation (MacLeod and Byrne 2012, 1).

The process of challenging power intrinsically means that those organizing must confront inequal power relationships and sustain opposition to this inequality over time (DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2010). Community organizing practices provide tools to cultivate an active local base, and build local leadership and advocacy capacity. Some organizations also combine this with rapid moments of short-term uprisings of mass participants (e.g., Engler and Engler 2016). In balancing organizing and mobilizing, organizations seek to maintain their activities across time and space to contest power effectively and sustainably. However, social change organizations across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand often function with little or no financial resources, while facing increasing criminalization of their actions through the erosion of political communication and protest rights (Gulliver et al. 2023). The extent to which these organizations achieve long-term power remains unknown.

The Current Study

Despite the growth of community organizing practices in the region alongside forces seeking to suppress it, little research focuses specifically on community organizing in the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand contexts (Greenaway and Witten 2006). This study aims to address this gap by providing a baseline understanding of the characteristics and challenges experienced by organizing groups across the region. In doing so, we also respond to Christens, Gupta, and Speer's (2021) call for in-depth research of how community organizing groups wield social power in their own local contexts and aims to broaden the research scope beyond mere quantification of participant characteristics (Speer and Han 2018).

In 2021 following the identification of a research gap around how community organizing groups define and understand organizing practices in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, the Commons Social Change Library and Australian Progress partnered to undertake a comprehensive survey. A survey was deemed the most appropriate method for data collection, allowing participants to complete it flexibly over a month and consult colleagues as needed. Generally, surveys are effective for collecting data on intangible human phenomena like opinions and facilitate cross-organizational and international comparisons (Phillips 2017; De Leeuw, Hox, and Dillman 2012). This approach enabled us to compare community organizing models in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, addressing two primary research questions:

> RQ1: What are the characteristics and commonalities around community organizing models in progressive groups across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand?
>
> RQ2: What challenges do groups experience when implementing community organizing structures and practices?

The survey was conducted in stages, beginning with the identification and invitation of potential participants. We compiled a list of 97 groups in both countries that engage volunteers to participate in collective action for progressive social change. Organizations such as food delivery

services or tree planting volunteer organizations, like the many Landcare groups, were excluded as they do not engage volunteers in collective action specifically seeking social change. The Commons Social Change Library contacted these groups directly, extending survey invitations and securing an ethics waiver for analyzing de-identified data (2022/HE001879). Organizations invited to respond were provided with the following information: 'The survey is for organizations operating in Australia and/or Aotearoa New Zealand who undertake some form of organizing. By this we mean you gather people together to take collective action (when a number of people work together to achieve a shared or common goal, whether online or offline).' Groups received the survey questions beforehand to facilitate internal discussions and data gathering. They were provided with the following definition of an organizing model: 'An 'organizing model' is the particular structure, roles, processes and allocation of resources that enables an organization to organize. It is how you make your organizing work: how you gather people together, grow, develop leaders, and make decisions.' The mix of open and closed ended survey questions focused on various aspects of organizing practices, including organizational power, structures, models, and the people involved in organizing models, emphasizing training, leadership, autonomy, and flexibility. The full list of questions can be found in Supplementary Table 1.

Of the 97 groups contacted, 24 responded (25%), with 23 (96%) completing the entire survey. Respondents' groups were most commonly focused on issues related to climate change (n = 11, 44%), followed by political issues, such as democratic rights and unionism (n = 7, 29%), environmental concerns (n = 5, 21%) and social issues (n = 1, 0.4%). One group focused on both climate and social issues. Respondents represented groups ranging from unions (n = 2), political parties (n= 2), as well as groups that had been formed within the last three years and those that been active for over four decades. The majority of respondents were primarily active in Australia (n = 20, 83%), which may reflect the substantial greater number of groups engaging in organizing than in Aotearoa New Zealand (Gulliver, Wibisono, and Louis 2022). The following section presents the survey results summarized in four sub-sections: power and model influences; structures and constituencies; staff and volunteers; and flexibility and autonomy. We follow with a discussion of key commonalities and challenges, and directions for future research.

Results

1. Organizational Power and Influences on Organizing Models

The survey began with two questions focusing on the rationale and purpose underpinning the organizing models used by respondents' groups. Respondents were asked 'How does your organization believe that change happens in the world?', and 'How do people give your organization power?' Responses to both questions indicated that most respondents focus on 'people power', usually conceptualized as a form of 'visible power'. This was most commonly understood as the power of people visibly participating in actions that exert pressure on decision makers such as politicians, governments or corporations, which was then believed to motivate those decision makers to act (Speer and Han 2018).

> *'By effectively engaging large numbers of [people] in politically strategic locations, we can grow and amplify visible community support for climate action and deliver targeted public pressure to motivate key representatives to support durable, bipartisan climate solutions.' (ID8)*

While some respondents emphasized the importance of empowerment, leadership, and strategic autonomy for participants, few mentioned local issues or stronger relationships as drivers of change. Instead, most respondents prioritized visible participation and large-scale mobilization within their organizing model structures. This suggests that organizations that

responded are not favoring deep relational organizing over mobilization events. Rather, many respondents are striving to create organizing models that simultaneously develop individual capacity and leadership while facilitating mass participation in large-scale actions (e.g. see also Engler and Engler 2016):

> *'Our goal is building a mass movement that can change systems. People and their alignment and active participation in mass numbers are our movement's only source of power.' (ID23)*

For some respondents, people power enabled confrontational challenges to power, which were essential to how they understood change happening in the world. Respondents mirrored McAlevey's (2016) argument that community organizing deploys the only advantage ordinary people have over elites: large numbers of strategically deployed masses in actions which can include nonviolent civil disobedience. For example, four respondents (all focused on climate change) noted that nonviolent direct-action tactics were integral to their theory of change.

> *'[Our organization] also promotes the idea that disruptive, nonviolent civil disobedience is a key element in driving change. It is not the only element, but it is the one our organization tries to focus on' (ID14)*

These responses suggest that community organizing practices used by survey respondents hinged around confrontation of inequal power relationships with corporations or politicians (DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2010). The goal of organizing to help individuals recognize systemic issues that may daily affect their lives may therefore be of lower priority (Christens, Gupta, and Speer 2021; Taylor and Wilson 2016). This inference may be a result of the predominant focus of most respondents on broad concerns, such as climate change and democratic rights, rather than local issues. Simultaneously, some respondents highlighted the importance of empowering people and building their agency and commitment to act within political processes. Some also suggested that their organizing practices sought to create new constituencies to build individual agency and thereby consolidate people power (Christens 2010; Speer and Han 2018).

> *'People power is built by helping individuals realize their own agency to change the world by acting with other people on strategic campaigns that shift power from big corporations to communities.' (ID2)*

In addition to the power derived from participation, five respondents (21%) noted that peoples' financial contributions provided organizational power, while three (13%) highlighted the impact of people sharing information and stories about organizational campaigns. These responses broadly align with resource mobilization theory (RMT: McCarthy and Zald 1977), which posits that social movements build power to effect change by acquiring and mobilizing financial, human and cultural resources. Respondents observed that people would bring in financial donations to pay staff, but also help support training, technical advice, and infrastructure to develop organizing practices. Many respondents explained that people help challenge opponent's social license and challenge the narratives of vested interests. In addition, some respondents noted that their organizing model sought to challenge what some describe as structural power: individuals' assumptions about how the world works (Speer and Han 2018). For example, one respondent reported how people within their organizing model held a specific power to challenge stereotypes and assumptions about their own constituency:

> *'Moderate, conservative people [from our constituency] taking bold action for the climate shows that so-called middle Australia are shifting towards supporting stronger*

> *climate action. As climate activists we are not the 'usual suspects' of what an activist looks like. Having people from a diverse group of [constituencies] and ethnicities also helps to grow and diversify the movement and build collective power.' (ID9)*

The second section of the survey explored which organizational model structures were used by respondents. Responses were diverse, mirroring the research context where community organizing practices have in general defied classification through their liberal deployment across many contexts including myriad terms, such as faith-based, democratic, identity based and participatory (Christens, Gupta, and Speer 2021; Speer and Han 2018). Respondents were asked to provide framework names, organizing examples or training programs that informed their groups' organizing models. Fourteen respondents (58%) provided the name of a model, of which the most common were described as the Ganz and Momentum models (each n = 3, 13%) and Snowflake models (n = 2, 8%). Strike circles, directed network, decentralized organizing, common ground, circles of commitment and Californian Farm Workers Union models or structures were provided by one respondent each. While most models were mentioned by groups working across different issues, 'momentum' was only mentioned by groups organizing on climate change. This may be due to its prevalence in climate organizing in the United States in the Sunrise Movement. Five respondents (21%) mentioned a bespoke model, influenced by a range of frameworks, while four respondents (17%) listed a range of influences and examples that informed their model design. For example, one respondent stated:

> *'At [our organization] we are inspired by numerous organizing frameworks and traditions, more recent inspiration and frameworks have come from but aren't limited to Marshall Ganz's Leadership, Organizing and Action program, Sydney Alliance, Adrienne Maree Brown. Our current training practices draw on frameworks and traditions from Plan to Win, Group Works, Training for Change and 350.org's training program. Our team also brings experience from organizing models at ACF, Greenpeace, The Community Organizing Fellowship, Solar Citizens, AYCC and Seed as well as Frontline Action on Coal.' (ID13)*

Our findings suggest that while organizing groups are heavily influenced by well-known organizing traditions that have arisen in the United States, these models are more likely to be mixed together into hybrid or bespoke Momentum-type model in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The wide diversity of models and lack of commonalities indicate that organizing structures are not applied as a 'one-size-fits-all' template for Australian or Aotearoa New Zealand organizing groups. Furthermore, these structures appear to be in a constant state of flux given the number of respondents noting that they were currently reviewing or changing their organizing model (n = 10, 42%), and those stating that their organizing model had been reviewed in the past 1 to 5 years (n = 7, 29%). As one respondent specifically noted, their model was in a continuous state of evolution and rebuilding, suggesting that dynamic organizing structures may be the norm rather than the exception across the region. Table 1 illustrates the combination and evolution of organizing models and approaches mentioned by respondents.

2. Organizational Model Structures and Constituencies

Our data indicates that community organizing undertaken by our respondents' groups is generally focused on a single issue, such as climate, worker rights, or political issues, with 21 respondents (88%) noting that they organize primarily with people acting on a broad issue. This focus on broader issues contrasts with prevailing definitions of community organizing, which stress a bottom-up approach where organizing progresses by listening to residents' concerns and then developing a shared analysis of priorities and strategies that are most relevant to those

residents (Christens, Gupta, and Speer 2021). The top-down single issue approach utilized by our respondents is described by some researchers as 'mobilizing' or 'advocacy' rather than community organizing; that is, it instead prioritizes mobilization undertaken without accountability to or input from the constituency (McAlevey 2016; Pyles 2009). Given that respondents also note that they engage directly in organizing practices, such as volunteer leadership development, this suggests that organizing models in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are evolving towards a hybrid model utilizing elements from both organizing and mobilizing approaches. Indeed, most respondents indicated that while they organize around a specific pre-determined issue, their model was structured around 'local groups', which often had the opportunity to act on local issues of relevance with centralized support and guidance:

> *'Our members create our policies, determine the strategic direction of the party and individual electoral strategies, and campaign to win us electoral and political power. We decentralize organizing power and enable campaigns to innovate, iterate and improve our processes by feeding back on the training and support we provide as well as sharing their lessons learnt through internal forums and skill shares.' (ID7)*

This strong pattern of centralized support with local input may reflect the context in which community organizing must operate in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Both countries have populations that are widely spread across diverse environmental, cultural and economic contexts, yet share a common concern around inadequate decision-maker responses to pressing issues. Paid organizers may only be available in the major population areas. For these reasons, local groups working on common national issues may be the most effective method of enhancing recruitment while connecting and supporting local volunteers in their organizing work. Organizing within a local area may increase the likelihood of finding common concerns around injustices that can motivate engagement in collective action (Van Zomeren 2013), as well as facilitating the relational practices that support empowerment and leadership.

> *'[Our organizing model] is simple and allows for a lot of local control.' (ID8)*

As shown on Table 2, 18 of the 24 respondents (75%) noted that they structured their organizing model around local groups. While geographic locality was a predominant driver of organizing group's structural arrangements, most respondents also incorporated other types of groups. These were most commonly groups of individuals built around a particular skill set (n = 12, 50%) and identity (n = 11, 46%). Respondents most sought to organize people who shared a concern about a particular issue (n = 20, 83%), most particularly issues that impact on everybody (n = 21, 88%).

The prevalence of locally-based groups suggests that this approach must provide benefits for organizations that may not be delivered through other model structures. A focus on local issues can effectively bring together people with shared interests, as well as increase opportunities for face-to-face relationship building, which may be more difficult to sustain in groups that are widely dispersed. However, local issues or locations should only be a starting place for community organizing, rather than an end point (DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2010). Emphasizing local, physically close groups of individuals may constrain mobilization within boundaries and limit participants' interest in going beyond these boundaries (see also Mihaylov 2021). Indeed, many of the challenges highlighted by respondents reflected the tensions inherent in maintaining long-term sustained relational organizing across significant geographic locations while building the operational structures required to facilitate mass participation in short-term uprisings.

Table 1: Definitions of Organizing Models

Model *(as described by respondents)*	**Definition**
Ganz Model (N = 3)	Ganz's organizing model focuses on developing leadership through relationships, storytelling, and strategy. It emphasizes the importance of building teams, creating shared purpose, and developing the capacity for strategic action. The model combines personal narrative (the "Story of Self"), collective identity (the "Story of Us"), and a vision for change (the "Story of Now") to motivate and mobilize people for collective action (Ganz 2010).
Momentum Model (N = 3)	The Momentum model is a hybrid organizing approach that combines elements of structure-based organizing and mass protest movements. It focuses on creating cascading cycles of momentum through escalating action, narrative power, and frontloading training. The model emphasizes building decentralized networks, creating a transformative narrative, and maintaining nonviolent discipline to achieve social change at scale. (Ayni Institute 2019).
Snowflake Model (N = 2)	The Snowflake model is a decentralized organizing structure that distributes leadership and decision-making across multiple levels of an organization or movement. It emphasizes empowering individuals to take on leadership roles, creating autonomous teams, and facilitating rapid scaling through replication of organizational structures. The model is named for its visual resemblance to a snowflake, with a central hub connected to multiple nodes, each of which can become a hub for additional nodes. (Ganz 2010) Although originating from the Ganz model, survey respondents perceived and described it as a distinct and separate model.
Strike Circles (N = 1)	The strike circles organizing model is a decentralized approach to labor organizing that focuses on building networks of workers who can quickly mobilize for collective action. It emphasizes creating small, autonomous groups of workers (circles) who meet regularly to discuss workplace issues, build solidarity, and plan actions. These circles are interconnected, allowing for rapid communication and coordination across a workplace or industry. The model aims to empower rank-and-file workers to lead their own organizing efforts and to create a flexible, resilient structure for sustained labor activism (e.g., McAlevey 2016).
Direct Network Structure (N = 1)	The directed network structure is an organizing model that combines decentralized, grassroots activism with centralized strategic coordination. It features relatively autonomous local groups connected through shared issues or goals, supported by centrally located formal organizations. These central bodies provide resources, professional support, and overall campaign strategy, while local groups maintain flexibility in their tactics and day-to-day operations. This model aims to balance the benefits of decentralized, community-based organizing with the strategic advantages of coordinated, large-scale mobilization (Gulliver, Fielding, and Louis 2021; Mogus and Liacas 2016).
Common Ground Approach (N = 1)	The common ground approach to organizing generally refers to a strategy that focuses on finding shared interests and values among diverse groups or individuals, even those who might typically be seen as opponents. This model emphasizes dialogue, relationship-building, and identifying mutual concerns as a basis for collective action.
Circles of Commitment Model (N = 1)	The circles of commitment model organizes supporters into concentric circles based on their level of engagement and commitment. The innermost circle represents the most dedicated core activists, with outer circles representing progressively less involved supporters. This model aims to create clear pathways for increasing engagement, allowing individuals to move from peripheral involvement to core leadership roles. It emphasizes the importance of relationship-building and provides a structure for targeted communication and task assignment based on commitment level (Han 2014).

Californian Farm Workers Union (N = 1)	The California farm workers union model of organizing is characterized by its use of nonviolent tactics, emphasis on worker empowerment, and integration of cultural and spiritual elements into labor activism. This approach combines traditional union organizing methods with community-based strategies, including boycotts, fasts, and pilgrimages. It emphasizes building a strong sense of identity and solidarity among workers, often leveraging cultural and religious symbols to mobilize support and create a moral framework for the struggle (Ganz 2009).
Bespoke (N = 11)	Customized organizing frameworks that integrate selected elements from multiple organizing models and methodologies. This category also includes organizing groups which described their approach as decentralized organizing in general, rather than referring to a specific model.

Table 2: Structures and Constituencies

Question	Responses	N	%
Does your organization include:	Local groups (groups of active supporters in a particular electorate or other geographic area)	18	75%
	Groups or committees with a particular skill set (such as lawyers, social media moderators)	12	50%
	Identity based groups (such as caucuses, affinity groups, reference groups or advisory committees)	11	46%
	Groups of people who provide support to the organization or network (e.g., assisting local groups)	10	42%
	Groups or committees with an issue focus	9	38%
	State or regional branches	7	29%
	Other kinds of groups (please specify)	6	25%
	Workplace organizing committees	1	4%
Which of the following options best describe the constituency you seek to organize?	Issues based (people with a concern about a particular issue)	20	83%
	Geographic communities (including towns, States and political electorates)	13	54%
	Identities (groups of people who hold a shared background or experience, such as parents, farmers, communities of color etc)	10	42%
	Political affiliation (e.g., political parties)	2	8%
	Other (please specify)	2	8%
	Workplaces	2	8%
	Faith community (people with a shared religion)	1	4%
What is the relationship of your constituency to the issues you are campaigning or advocating about?	Acting on a broad issue that has some impact on many people/everyone	21	88%
	Lived experience but not necessarily directly impacted	16	67%
	Directly and currently impacted	15	63%
	Acting from values but no direct impact or lived experience of the issue	14	58%
	Other	1	4%

3. Staff and Volunteers within Organizing Models

Effective community organizing must support and engage individuals to participate in sustained collective action, as longevity is central to building and exercising power that can address systemic issues (Christens, Gupta, and Speer 2021). To explore this, questions were posed regarding staff and volunteers within the organizing model. Table 3 presents results on the

number of staff and supporters in each organization, indicating substantial diversity in the number of active people involved in each organization.

Table 3: Staff and Supporters

Question	M (SD)	Range
How many paid staff do you have supporting your organizing and mobilizing work?	5.91 (10.05)	0-45
How many people in total are active in these groups right now? That is, people who are organizing or participating directly in a group?	438 (1,268.86)	13-5,627
Please provide the numbers of currently active people in each circle in the Circles of Commitment framework for your organization now (mid-2022).		
• Community	1,733,910 (2,153,722)	0-8,000,000
• Crowd	105,279 (140,355)	30-500,000
• Contributors	9,022 (22,849)	3-104,341
• Committed	2,103 (6,767)	5-32,158
• Core	104 (194)	2-804

While the majority of organizations engaging in advocacy in Australia are volunteer run (Gulliver, Fielding, and Louis 2020), almost all respondents were in paid roles. Two respondents were from organizations with no paid staff, although one of these respondents' organizations was supported with paid staff from another organization. The majority of respondents noted that they used some form of 'Circles of Engagement' to track the different participation of volunteers, however some reported that they did not have technological resources to track numbers, or the organizational capacity to monitor them.

> *'We do have access through Action Network (database) to ladders of engagement but our ability and willingness to use them seriously is patchy. Currently a new attempt at attracting and retaining folks is going on, with new people and some new thinking going on.' (ID14)*

Additionally, despite the use of Circles of Engagement, the results indicate a wide diversity of numbers. For example, five respondents noted that they had eight or less people as 'core', while one organization had 804 and another 500. Some respondents noted that data tracking was another challenge in and of itself:

> *'This [people within our circle of engagement] is really impossible for us to track.' (ID15)*

Groups with a large number of core participants may be limited in their ability to engage in relational conversations, particularly 'one-on-ones', which are a fundamental component of many community organizing approaches (Alinsky 1971). Some respondents mentioned that the snowflake model was particularly effective in connecting larger numbers of participants without the need for direct organizer attention.

> *'The focus on relational organizing and snowflake model means that everyone is connected with each other and things can function without the organizer around most of the time.'(ID12)*

Some respondents highlighted the importance of their existing core group, noting the value of dedicated, committed people who have self-selected their roles and share their skills and knowledge with newer members of the group. Some respondents noted that the local nature of

their groups made recruitment easier by allowing community-based actions that enabled them to build local relationships and offered greater opportunities to take ownership of the group activities.

> *'Recruitment in localities where we have local groups, volunteers have lots of opportunities to learn and step up to take in more responsibility.' (ID1)*

Many respondents noted the importance of having participation pathways for new volunteers, which included emails lists, news briefing, training, paid internships, providing opportunities to speak on behalf of the organization, planning sessions with staff, and multiple calls to actions.

> *'Our training curriculum of entry level workshops, skills-based trainings, understanding justice, and leadership trainings help people step through the ladder of engagement in a clear and supported way.' (ID2)*

Despite the high reported participation of volunteers in most respondents' organizations, staff played a critical role in developing and maintaining organizational processes. Almost all respondents' organizations (n = 23, 96%) were supported by paid organizers based primarily in major population centers and urban areas. These staff played a number of important roles, such as facilitating connections between local groups and the broader movement network. Some respondents also suggested that staff enabled strategic development and strong connections between each level of the organization. Through these processes, local community-based groups can learn about and confront broader issues and problems beyond their own local conditions.

> *'Having a frontloaded five-year strategy allows us to quickly share our plans and help new members and groups take ownership over it. Our regular welcome call practice and focus on absorption allows us to grow after each action. We have a movement council team who is representative of the movement, our goals and diversity and they help keep the leadership team highly accountable to the movement.' (ID23)*

Similarly, staff played an important role in modelling relational organizing practices. For example, one respondents' organization ran a fellowship program through utilizing staff capacity. While this program recruited less participants than open volunteer recruitment, the teaching of relational practices ensured that the participants became skilled in parliamentary advocacy extremely quickly. Another respondent noted that volunteers appreciated staff sharing their skills and experience in actions, while others noted that paid organizers underpinned their organizing momentum:

> *'We are … building from a "local organizer" focus with the role of the core volunteer to connect with existing groups and organizations as well as bringing on board new people. … We have had serious investment in our organizing program from the rest of the organization which is enabling us to resource on ground organizing efforts with paid capacity in each of our key regions.' (ID13)*

Centralized staff can also help sustain volunteer groups over the longer term, create more effective campaigns, and reduce the burdens placed on volunteer leaders (Gulliver, Fielding, and Louis 2021; Mogus and Liacas 2016). Staff are able to build action pathways and participation opportunities that enable new volunteers to feel efficacious and effective, important factors that increase individuals intentions to participate in collective action (Rosenblatt 2014; Van Zomeren 2013):

> *'Our organizing model is focused around campaign participation and building networks through common issues. I think this is good because we attract people who are interested in taking action now, and participation has a goal and target outcomes. We focus on tangible changes that people will be able to see in their community.'(ID20)*

However, many respondents noted that a lack of staff capacity severely limited the number of participants they could engage and build relationships with. For example, one respondent's organization had accepted this as a reality and moved to only recruiting for specialized volunteer roles as a result:

> *'We don't have enough staff time to put into it and the nature of the organization means campaigns move quickly and we are so 'self-sufficient' that we don't prioritize bringing volunteers along. We do a good job at getting vols into specialized roles however.'(ID16)*

In addition, the geographic focus of local groups reflects the 'geography of political power' centralized in major cities in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand (Tattersall 2015, 388). The distance this necessitated between local groups also generated significant challenges for paid organizing staff. Some respondents also noted the difficulty in building local groups in communities where many other groups are already active, and the difficulty in supporting volunteers in areas where no groups currently exist.

> *'Sometimes the branch covers as many as six local government areas so the geographic distance between members makes it hard for folks to organize and mobilize around political issues or election campaigns.' (ID7)*

4. Leadership Recruitment and Retention

The development of grassroots leaders has been described as the 'most fundamental building block' of community organizing (Christens, Gupta, and Speer 2021, 3006). One of the defining features of community organizing is its focus on prioritizing the development of leaders, who share responsibility and commitment for the cause (Divakaran and Nerbonne 2017; Pyles 2009). Leadership development enables people to confront power and address issues (Pyles 2009), and leadership teams play a critical role in mobilizing the political, economic and cultural power of their teams to effect change (Ganz 2010; 2009). Yet, recruiting and retaining volunteer leaders was identified as a challenge for almost all respondents, whether they were established, well-resourced and more centralized organizations, or informal and autonomous volunteer-based social movement groups (see also Gulliver, Fielding, and Louis 2022).

> *'Leadership identification is a challenge. Our pool of active volunteers is small compared to our ambitions and the supporter base. People tend to be time poor or are involved with many issues.' (ID9)*

Almost all respondents noted that their organization had some process in place for recruiting, training and retaining leaders. Training (n = 20, 83%) was the most common method of developing leadership, followed by identifying potential leaders and supporting them to take on leadership roles (n = 19, 79%). Coaching and mentoring (n = 18, 75%), and self-selection (n = 17, 71%) were also mentioned by the majority of respondents. Despite these pathways, respondents noted significant challenges about every component of leadership. Many respondents reported that their organizing models were constrained by a lack of local leaders and issues with leader retention:

> *'It's identifying new leaders and to step them up who have the time and capacity to lead a new group that takes the most effort and time. Often times with our teams, the leaders who we invest time and energy into skilling up end up moving on to paid roles and we have to start the cycle again of building teams and building the new leaders up to lead.' (ID12)*

Many respondents mentioned how they were trying to bring in new and diverse perspectives into their organizing models. However, challenges in recruiting diverse voices into organizing roles flowed on to difficulties in elevating these voices in leaderships roles. Despite these challenges, building the voices and leadership of diverse constituencies was a key goal identified by some respondents. Respondents particularly highlighted the importance of decolonizing organizing and bringing intersectional and justice-focused approaches to both place-based, and member led activities. One organization specifically worked with feminist participatory action researchers to advance bring more diversity into organizing and leadership roles, while another noted their work seeking to reach out and engage new voices in their mobilized community:

> *'We have organized events both in person and online trying to connect people up with Australia's history of NVDA and community organizing. First Nations issues, unionism, pacifism, anti bases, feminism, queer activism--you name it, we have tried to build people's sense of activist history and inspiration.' (ID14)*

5. Autonomy and Flexibility

Regardless of the particular characteristics of an organizing model, issue or structure, one challenge crossed them all: how to balance autonomy and flexibility between people and organizations. Balancing the need for local groups to have autonomy in their areas of focus and interests with the broader strategy and goals of an organization was identified in an early community organizing model developed by the Sydney Alliance in Australia in 2015 (Tattersall 2015). Our respondents indicated that this balance continues to present challenges:

> *'We enable quite a bit of autonomy in supporting activists to work on campaigns / initiatives that interest them, however, when this is too disparate, I worry it increases burnout risk.'(ID3)*

Some respondents also noted that the nature of their campaigning work, particularly that focusing on politicians and elections, necessarily dictated their local groups' priorities and activities. Pre-established priorities reduced flexibility of leaders and volunteers to pivot to local issues or other activities. In addition, resourcing constraints meant that there was seldom enough paid organizer capacity to support volunteers to autonomously act and gain power (Speer and Han 2018). Divakaran and Nerbonne (2017) argue that relational organizing that empowers people through building trusted interpersonal relationships is the most important goal of organizing (see also Speer and Han 2018). Yet, building and maintaining these relationships is heavily resource intensive, presenting an ongoing challenge for community organizing groups (Tattersall 2015). For some, this was particularly acute as their organizing model achieved success beyond its capacity to grow:

> *'Our fundraising isn't keeping up with our organizing. Our movement grows to a higher number of brand new volunteers than our existing organizers and coaches have capacity to support. We are able to give away the strategy and set them up to run it but aren't able to support them to build their skills and teams at the level we would like. We need money to hold more trainings and to hire more organizers.' (ID23)*

A number of other staff-related challenges were mentioned. Recruiting experienced, skilled organizers can be challenging, with significant time and resources required to develop and build their own relational and organizing skills (Tattersall 2015). Staff can also exacerbate or be constrained by organizational structures that create hierarchical or transactional relationships, which then in turn can remove autonomy, alienate participants and stifle a movement's ability to adapt and change (Liao 2024; Divakaran and Nerbonne 2017). The professionalization of community organizing can play a role in this, with professional staff directing and controlling mobilization – caring little for who turns up to an action, so long as bodies are there (McAlevey 2016). This tension was very present for many respondents who recognized the challenge of maintaining autonomous yet supportive staff-volunteer relationships:

> *'The biggest strength also creates the biggest challenge and potential weakness. That is the distributed nature of the model. Activists hold the key elements and functions of the organizing model. This is achieved by decentralizing the knowledge basis and skillsets and empowering members and activists to lead and set the direction. While we lost a lot of groups (~80) when we shifted from a regional to national approach the groups that remain are self-sustaining. Creates a regional space - previously staff and regional activist leaders had moments of stepping on each other's toes. However, it remains an ongoing dance with regions having different needs / wants.' (ID3)*

Yet, examples of locally lead community organizing occur in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. MacLeod and Brynes' (2012) case study on the Graceville community garden organizing group in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, and Dutta, Elers, and Jayan's (2020) analysis of Te Araora checkpoints during Covid in Aotearoa New Zealand are examples where these structures have emerged. Similarly, the Sydney Alliance followed Alinsky's method to build local organizing skills before identifying specific demands for action. This contrasted with organizing around an already decided issue or campaign. However, as noted by Tattersall (2015), this approach generated criticisms around the modest success experienced over time and impatience for achieving concrete goals. Alternative outcomes metrics such as the forty-five partner organizations and training of over 2000 people demonstrated how bottom-up community organizing could achieve transformational, collective outcomes, yet were not always valued as highly as the sum of individual actions and outcomes more easily quantified by mobilization and campaign metrics (see also Gulliver, Fielding, and Louis 2019; Speer and Han 2018).

Others noted that the longer-term focus on building organizing structures and individual capabilities may reduce flexibility to deliver the actions and outcomes sought by new participants. At the individual group level this could lead to tensions between the necessary work required to build a sustainable and productive group, particularly by leaders and leadership teams, with the need for urgent action and outcomes (Han and Oyakawa 2018).

> *'We also have the … familiar tension between being well organized, clearly structured, and focused on making sure we can attract, integrate and retain new people on the one hand--and ACTION ACTION ACTION on the other. We recently managed to leap the hurdle of splitting apart over essentially this tension.' (ID14)*

One way in which respondents sought to manage this tension was to provide multiple entry points for new participants via a range of actions that were managed almost entirely by staff. For example, welcome webinars, film screenings, petitions and the provision of easily accessible resources were argued to support rapid local action by participants. Participants could opt in for engaging in these activities, thus allowing flexibility in developing their own organization

priorities, but also ensure that local group activity was focused on actions that were most likely to help achieve key organizational goals:

> *'[Our model works well by] using moments of momentum to bring energy. Directed Network model - while it has its downsides - overall helps build national cohesion and focus to win.' (ID22)*

Discussion

This study explored the characteristics and commonalities in organizing models used by 24 community organizing groups as well as the tensions that they experienced in implementing and sustaining community organizing within these models. We found that there is a prevalence of geographically-based organizing around single issues, such as climate change and democratic participation, across both countries, with organizing structures informed by traditions from the United States yet most frequently combined in novel and bespoke structures depending on the resources groups had to sustain organizing staff or volunteers. In addition, we found a strong focus on relationship-building and leadership development, although many groups noted that their organizing models were substantially affected by challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers. Our research highlights that in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand there commonly is a blending of community organizing and social movement mobilization strategies, with many groups adopting a directed network campaign structure. Challenges identified include staff overburden, the need for improved volunteer support systems, and the tension between building deep relationships and meeting mobilization targets. In the following sections we consider these findings more deeply.

Our first research question examined the characteristics and commonalities of community organizing models. The findings reveal a substantial diversity of influences and structures used by community organizing groups in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The groups varied widely in size, ranging from fewer than five core participants to communities of supporters numbering 8,000,000. However, their models shared two overarching similarities: they organized around pre-determined issues such as climate change and human rights, and they primarily organized groups based in a specific geographic location. This illustrates that in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, while the structure relies on geographic opportunism, motives of community organizing strongly remain centered on local connections and relational practices.

Scholars have long posited that organizing fundamentally aims to take people on a journey from empowerment to participation to leadership, as well build alliances across civil society, in order to build awareness of systemic injustices and yield power to alleviate them (Christens, Gupta, and Speer 2021; Divakaran and Nerbonne 2017; Jarvis 2023). Most respondents emphasized how their organizing model prioritizes fostering supportive, enduring relationships with participants, cultivating individual agency and providing pathways to autonomous leadership. However, the primary goal for most groups seemed to focus on augmenting the number of people involved in predefined campaigns, issues, or actions. This 'organizing for mobilizing' approach that was prevalent in our data suggests a blurring of distinctions around community organizing and social movements in the region. Community organizing is traditionally seen as focusing on building organizations and delivering services through techniques like base-building and leadership identification. In contrast, social movements aim to draw large numbers of people to specific causes, often national in scope and shorter-lived, driven by ideological frameworks (Kirshner, Tivaringe, and Fernández 2021). Yet, our findings suggest that in the groups studied, organizing and social movement mobilization are closely intertwined. Our respondents' groups often simultaneously develop and support leaders, while focusing on local

issues and coordinating across broader regions, with some aspects of their work professionalized through external funding for longer-term campaigns (Mihaylov 2021; Speer and Han 2018). This lends weight to arguments that organizing shares a common origin and deep connection with social movements, which often begin as local, isolated efforts that snowball into movements that are much larger than their single constituent parts (DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2010).

Several factors may contribute to the prevalence of this hybrid organizing model approach. Firstly, it may reflect funding imperatives, as mobilization outcomes are more easily quantified than organizing outcomes, and funding in the progressive social change sector remains highly competitive. Secondly, the vast geographic distances separating communities in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand present unique challenges for face-to-face relationship building, potentially pushing organizations towards mobilization strategies that can more easily bridge these gaps. Additionally, the focus on broad, often global issues like climate change may necessitate a hybrid approach that combines local organizing with larger-scale mobilization efforts. These factors appear to support the emergence of structures which loosely mirror that of a directed network campaign. Such structure involves relatively autonomous local groups connected through shared issues, which are supported by centrally located, regional or national, formal organizations that acquire resources, provide professionalized support and undertake campaign strategy and implementation (Gulliver, Fielding, and Louis 2021; Mogus and Liacas 2016). To explore this organizing adaptation, future research could utilize diverse data sources, such as websites, e-newsletters, interviews and surveys, to map the structure of a greater number of progressive organizations across Oceania and explore how this might be changing over time. Strong integration of community organizing approaches with social movement mobilization goals may, in fact, be the norm in the region.

Our second research question explored the challenges experienced by groups undertaking community organizing in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. All respondents reported issues with recruiting and retaining volunteers, especially volunteer leaders. This led to staff being frequently overburdened through obligations to take on extra tasks and continuously recruit and train new leaders. Some researchers suggest that a structure prioritizing top-down, staff-supported mobilization can hinder sustained local participant engagement, a characteristic attributed to social movements (e.g., Divakaran and Nerbonne 2017). They argue that an apparent lack of relational depth in these mobilizations acts as a deterrent to deeper involvement. Yet, our findings indicate that maintaining long-term engagement with volunteers and leaders is a widespread issue across organizations, whether they engage in community organizing or social movement mobilization. It emerges as a common hurdle for any group endeavoring to mobilize individuals for action, reflecting a broader issue inherent to structures reliant on volunteerism rather than specific organizational strategies focused on community organizing or social movement mobilization (Gulliver, Fielding, and Louis 2022).

The voluntary aspect of activism and collective action is often under-discussed, and yet is a critical component of participation intentions and behaviors (Gulliver, Fielding, and Louis 2020). Volunteers balance personal and professional commitments, navigate internal group conflicts, contribute without financial incentive, and sometimes experience minimal success. Volunteer leaders bear these burdens, while also supporting new members, shaping group processes, and helping to strategize. This unpaid labor often disproportionately falls on women (Jupp 2012), and may exclude those who may suffer the most from systemic injustices (Jarvis 2023). Consequently, adopting Alinsky's concept of the (paid) organizer as a 'tactical expert' (Divakaran and Nerbonne 2017) might allow volunteers to focus more on building relationships rather than

administrative duties. The prevalence of centralized staff structures across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand may help explain the types of models used by organizations in this study, given their effectiveness in easing volunteer workloads. However, we note that centralized staff can also lead to centralization of power and loss of democratic decision-making within an organizing model (Liao 2024). We also recognize the limitations of our data in exploring this question: survey respondents were primarily staff, not volunteer organizers, and only one of the 24 respondents organized in a fully volunteer run group. Different group members across staffed and volunteer organizations may have more varied experiences and perceptions of organizing and volunteering (Gulliver, Fielding, and Louis 2022). Future research should aim to include multiple participants as well as fully volunteer organizations to understand these differing perspectives.

The struggle to recruit and retain volunteers also created strains for staff. Many noted the necessity of improved onboarding processes, increased support capacity, guidelines for decentralizing strategic decisions, better data systems, and enhanced community diversity. Yet, few organizations allocated sufficient resources for staff to address these needs. Consequently, staff time was consumed by maintaining existing groups and processes, which could impede the development of meaningful relationships crucial for a robust organizing force (Frey 2021). Where some groups reported successful long-term volunteer retention, it was often grounded in mutual respect between staff or volunteer organizers, and their supported individuals. Effective community organizers must support effective leadership teams by building trusting relationships, enhancing skills, and fostering mutual responsibility and accountability (Ganz 2009; 2010). However, staff are often required to perform a wide range of tasks beyond relationship building. Prioritizing the recruitment of staff with strong relational skills and focusing on developing leaders who can amplify collective action are keys to building effective power. As Tattersall (2015) observes, testing potential organizers helps identify individuals suited for this challenging work. Yet, obstacles like short-term funding, competition for resources, and vast geographic distances often undermine these efforts.

Our study reveals that while community organizing groups in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand face challenges similar to those in other countries, they also exhibit unique characteristics that contribute to our understanding of evolving organizing models. Unlike traditional approaches driven by local community concerns, organizations in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand more commonly focus on single, broad, and global issues, such as climate change, creating a distinctive blend of local connection with international priorities. Furthermore, we observed a significant blurring of lines between organizing and mobilizing strategies, which appears to be particularly pronounced in this region. Our study also shows a tendency for Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand organizations to constantly change their organizing models to adjust to their evolving needs, program, and size. These findings represent a substantial contribution to understanding how organizing models are developing and evolving in these countries, building upon and adapting frameworks originally developed in the United States. Notably, our research uncovered widespread issues in volunteer recruitment and retention across various organizational structures, indicating a systemic challenge in the region rather than a problem specific to any particular organizing model. These unique insights suggest several important implications for practice and future research in the field of community organizing.

First, the study and teaching of organizing could contribute more effectively to practice by providing evidence-based comparative research on the relative effectiveness and longevity of different organizing structures, as well as successful recruitment and retention processes.

Developing and testing flexible volunteer recruitment models and practices that allow for volunteer's additional responsibilities would benefit nearly all respondents in this process. Implementing clear participation pathways and staged leadership development practices designed for organizers to support volunteers would be valuable. Future studies could also investigate the interrelationships and potential interdependencies among the key dimensions identified in this paper. For instance, research could explore how volunteer recruitment and retention strategies might influence or be influenced by organizational structure, or how leadership development practices impact the effectiveness of different organizing structures. Such investigations would provide a more holistic understanding of community organizing dynamics and potentially reveal synergies or trade-offs between different aspects of organizing practice. Second, a deeper examination of organizing model structures incorporating different staff and volunteer practices could reveal the skills and attributes necessary to support successful organizing approaches. Third, accessible masterclasses, case studies, narratives, and practical resources could provide guidance for groups reassessing or evolving their models. Fourth, funding bodies and movement infrastructure groups could develop more suitable metrics to evaluate relationally based organizing. Current metrics, such as the number and growth of groups, leaders, and participants, might undermine the power-building envisioned by relational organizing (Speer and Han 2018), and push respondents towards conceptualizing organizing as a form of mobilizing—prioritizing numbers over depth of engagement (Han 2012; McAlevey 2016). Finally, many respondents emphasized the importance of dismantling oppressive structures, amplifying marginalized voices, and adopting inclusive and intersectional approaches (echoing Han and Oyakawa 2018). Yet, the outcomes of these efforts and participation from diverse communities have seldom been quantitatively measured. Tracking participant demographics and experiences over time may help reveal the barriers and opportunities that underpin sustainable, inclusive and empowering organizing structures.

Conclusion

This study reveals a landscape of community organizing models in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, where community organizing approaches are characterised by diversity in influence, structure, and size, yet unified in their focus on specific geographic locales and single issues, such as climate change and human rights. Many respondents highlighted how their organizing models incorporated elements of traditional organizing traditions, such as the Ganz model, alongside flexible processes seeking to mobilize larger numbers of participants in one-off events such as rallies. This blending of traditional community organizing approaches with mobilizing moments may reflect a regional tendency towards directed network structures rather than a predominant focus on deep relational organizing which may be more prominent in other countries. However, this integration brings its own set of complexities, particularly in recruiting and retaining volunteers. The particular struggle to engage and sustain volunteer leaders emerges as a universal concern, transcending the nature or focus of the group, and reflecting broader challenges associated with volunteerism.

While community organizing may be an effective means by which to address challenges faced in society and the world (Christens, Gupta, and Speer 2021), rising inequality exacerbates the already huge demands placed on people to function and survive, let alone find the time to build collective power and lead activities to wield it. The research underscores the need for a shift in how we understand and support the voluntary nature of activism, suggesting a potential reevaluation of organizational structures to alleviate the burden on volunteers. The prevalence of staff-driven models may offer some solutions but also highlights the varied experiences and perceptions of organizing between staff and volunteers. The study suggests a path forward that

involves not only more inclusive and comprehensive research but also a more nuanced approach to volunteer support, leadership development, and resource allocation. Addressing these will require a multifaceted approach, combining practical support for volunteers with a deeper understanding of the interplay between local and broader mobilization efforts. This understanding is vital to harnessing the full potential of community organizing as a force for social change and empowerment.

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Supplemental Table 1: Examples of Respondent Comments

Model	Description of model characteristics	Description of organizing model shifts and evolution
Ganz (N = 3)	'We are working on developing a distributed leadership/snowflake model of leadership where a number of workplaces form a geographical group or campaign hub to organize at a local area. Our organizing work is very much modeled on theory from Marshall Ganz and Jane McAlevey with nearly all organizers participating in [relevant training courses]. The team is made up of [multiple separate] teams [working across different areas]' (ID6)	'[Our model] has evolved gradually over time as we have developed the skills of our team. This year we changed the structure and focus of the work of the team to give most organizers just one sector to focus their work in to allow better focused work to build local structures and build local power.' (ID6)
Momentum (N = 3)	'We are inspired by the Momentum model of organizing. This is a hybrid between structured organizing and mass protest' (ID23) 'In theory we are using a momentum drive organizing model. But the flow of people in and out, the level of change nationally and internationally in [our organization] since the pandemic began in particular, means that it's hard to answer this question…We initially ran [groups, trainings and talks with other groups]. The decentralized model of organizing …. has been influential here but it has also been controversial.' (ID14)	'We frontloaded our organizing model in 2020. [It] hasn't changed but our structure to support it has shifted approximately every 3-5 months as our movement has grown in size and strategic capacity.'(ID14)
Snowflake (N = 2)	'The snowflake is the key way we organize volunteers around a [key moment]. People are also organized into [local] structures, and we also have networks (both lived experience and issue based)' (ID15)	'Our version of the snowflake model changes slightly every [key moment]. We recently completely changed our organizing model … to better align with our indigenous world view as partners.' (ID15) 'The structure of the teams and groups have definitely changed depending on who is setting up the teams (who is the organizer) and where we are on the campaign/ organizing cycle.' (ID12)
Strike circles (N = 1)	'Sunrise Movement's Strike Circles are a form of inspiration … the strike network has historically focused on striking' (ID19)	'There have been shifts to longer-term, organizing focused campaigns (like our [campaign] requiring in-community organizing), but these haven't taken off with [our supporters]. We are currently within a new campaign cycle which will see smaller-scale, organizing-focused actions. It's too early to evaluate success.' (ID19)
Direct network	'We are in the process of deciding what our organizing model will look like. Currently, almost all communication runs between staff	'The campaign was designed to work in the style of Directed Network as described by Netchange. The idea was that a central hub would be

(N = 1)	and community members, without a good space for the community to communicate with each other. I would say it's more a mobilizing model … We intend to still work towards a Directed Network campaign but have not decided how we might support e.g. groups or go for a more grassroots style of leadership development, or a membership model.' (ID5)	organizing organizations. Somewhat unexpectedly, we've ended up with our own list of supporters. [Our] original campaign was not designed with our own list of supporters in mind.' (ID5)
Common ground (N = 1)	'Campaign frames and values' (ID4) [Note: no further elaboration by the respondent was provided]	'Our organization tries to stay abreast of campaigning best practice. We have also brought on additional staff so that we have been able to do more things in the organizing space' (ID4)
Circles of commitment (N = 1)	'Circles of commitment. [Our constituency group] organizing. Leader-centric, local group organizing in areas relevant to political constituencies.' (ID8) [Note: no further elaboration by the respondent was provided].	None provided by respondents
Californian farm workers union (N = 1)	'We're inspired by union organizing models to take common lived experiences to create community and commonality. Specifically, the approach of the Californian Farm Workers Union. We are also inspired by mass action campaigns from the environment, anti-nuclear and social justice campaigns where we aim to reach the point where we can display strength through moments of large in-person events.' (ID20)	None provided by respondents
Bespoke or mix of organizing models, and broad mentions of decentralized organizing in general (N = 11)	'This is a model we are aiming towards however is not currently used. There is quite a mishmash of how we organize and work with volunteers at the moment, with people across specialized teams as well as in 'Hubs' which exist across the country.' (ID16) 'Four pillars of [our organization], charter of [our organization], consensus decision making, circles of commitment/ladder of engagement, snowflake model' (ID7) 'Saddleback (Circles of Commitment), Snowflake model, Indivisible, IAF … Our first model was built around politically strategic geographic locations, but we soon learned that the work of building long term power outpaced the politics of the day. It was also resource intensive, lonely work built solely around the work of an individual organizer in a community. Organizing	'We have on and off had volunteer, local groups. These have existed for local tactics, when campaigns have distributed work to do, or to funnel people into specialized teams and get them skilled in Direct Action. We also have done community organizing in local areas where we have had a place-based campaign.' (ID16) 'Our campaign teams undertake trial and error of different things and share their results when successful. We also evolve through interaction with, and learning from other similar member-led, volunteer organizations.' (ID7) 'Organizing 3.0, which is in development, will be built around a 'breadth' and 'depth' model. This is where not every group will have dedicated staffing support, and that groups will be assigned either national network

	2.0 focused on developing a consistent, national model that had national support structures to alleviate some of the burden on organizers. It also supported groups to set up where there was interest in doing so.' (ID21)	support, or deep organizing support depending on their strategic location, their capability and their health.' (ID21)