Digital Organizing
Strategies

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Introduction

This brief presents best practices and strategies for organizing online, based on interviews with ten organizing groups and a review of available literature. The companion report, *Digital Organizing: It's all about the apps*, introduces the idea of digital organizing and shares the applications most used by community organizers. A series of resource documents provide additional information. For example, Resource Document A includes a brief introduction to the interviewed organizations.

How Community Organizers Use Apps

Building Power

Building & Sustaining Organizational Capacity

Community Organizers

Inspiring Action

Integrating Tools and Communications

Building Narrative Power

Approach with Curiosity

Base Building

Choosing the Right Apps

These publications are based on a study of digital organizing that was conducted by the Research Hub for Youth Organizing at the University of Colorado Boulder and commissioned by The Colorado Trust, to support the digital organizing work of the Building and Bridging Power Initiative. For a detailed description of the research design and data collection process, please refer to Resource Document B. For definitions of key terms used throughout this report, please refer to Resource Document C.

Scholars distinguish between two major components of social movement organizing: 1) those activities that build power to advance contentious actions, and 2) those that build and sustain organizational capacity.[1]

In this report, we group findings by this distinction and in the following sections, we organize strategies accordingly. Across the interviews, we identified three main power building strategies in which apps are used: base building, building narrative power and inspiring action.   We also identified three main capacity building strategies for using apps: choosing the right apps for your base, approaching digital organizing with curiosity, creativity, and flexibility, and integrating communications and digital organizing across all areas of the organization. The remainder of this report explains these strategies further.

Using Apps to Build Power

Researchers have long-studied online organizing.[2] Recent studies have addressed the many ways that digital tools can be integrated into the power-building process. In this study, organizers described: (1) how to use digital apps to build the base of people who work towards their same goals, (2) how to build the power to shift the public narrative towards the justice they seek, and (3) how to inspire action in their communities. In this report we share these strategies and the lessons learned from each. This information is quickly summarized in the table below.

Organizing Goals	Strategies	Lessons
Build Power	Base Building	• Provide consistent engagement, which is as important as huge numbers. • Know which part of your organization's base is on which social media apps. • Learn about the subculture of each social media app. • Remember social media is public!
	Building Narrative Power	• Remember that apps can help your organization develop messages and gather statements quickly from your members. • Know that messaging information for social media can be a balancing act. • Create both an internal and external communications toolkit. • Create a shared calendar that aligns communications with other organizational work. • Execute cross-posting and tagging, which can help your team reach organizing targets.
	Inspiring Action	• Create "activation seeds" in multiple places. • Create videos which are powerful. • Amplify your allies.

Base Building with Social Media

Social media can be a powerful tool for base building. Typically, base-building is seen as a relational process that involves identifying and understanding people's shared interests, aspirations, and everyday lives. Historically, these relationships were created with well-known strategies like door-knocking, holding local meetings, and hosting large events.[a] Today, community organizers use social media to expand their base-building toolkit. Below are specific tips for using social media in base building.

Base building—Expanding the number of people 1) who are aligned with an organization's goals, 2) are in direct communication with organizers, and 3) will take action on an issue.

Provide consistent engagement, which is as important as huge numbers.

In the world of social media, people talk about a post as "going viral," or reaching many people. "Going viral" is the result of numerous people sharing a post on social media apps with their contacts, who then share it again with their contacts. Having a social media post go viral is one way for community organizers to grab the attention of new potential members or to engage members in taking action. But organizers explain that the goal of a strong social media campaign is not that every post go viral. Instead, the goal is to consistently reach and engage specific allies and audiences. For example, an organizer from Californians for Justice, a statewide youth-powered organization, explains, "You don't necessarily need a very high turnout. You need folks who are going to come out and then consistently return." Californians for Justice's social media strategy aims to catch the attention of known allies and to inspire them to stay committed to the struggle for education justice.

Know which part of your organization's base is on which social media apps.

A strong social media campaign targets the right information to the right audience. It is critical to know the demographics of the organization's base, as well as the demographics of the users on each social media app. Resource Document E provides a table with user demographics for various applications.

Student Voice, a national, youth-led organization uses **Instagram** to attract and engage their youth

[a] This definition was informed and created from the Research Hub for Youth Organizing work with FCYO's Pipelines to Power Initiative and featured in the third-year internal evaluation report submitted to P2P.

members in actions. They described **Instagram** as a great app for bringing new millennials and some Gen-Zers[b] into their campaigns and the work of the organization. Said one organizer:

> "Instagram is how we try to reach new students more than other applications. So, if we're trying to get students to come to a campaign call, or fill out a survey, or do a call-to-action, that's the application we use consistently."—Student Voice

By comparison, Student Voice and Californians for Justice both use **Facebook** for fundraising because their **Facebook** "audience is mainly adults, teachers, college students who might be alumni of programs or the team." These older allies are more likely to have money to donate to support their organization. Other interviewed organizations similarly used **Instagram** to reach youth members and Facebook to reach adult allies.

Language is another important part of targeted messaging. For example, Colorado Youth Congress shared this **Instagram** post in July 2021, as they were looking to engage new youth members in their programs. While the main photo is in English, the descriptive post is in both Spanish and English.

Twitter is useful in reaching multiple generations. According to a consultant with the Partnership for the Future of Learning, Twitter seems to have "millennial and Gen-Xers," which situates it in the generational middle of Instagram (mostly Gen Z and millennials) and Facebook (mostly Gen X and Baby Boomers). For a description of these popular generational definitions see Resource Document F.

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[b] In Resource Document F, we provide additional information on the terms used for different generations, from Baby Boomers (57-75 years of age) to Gen A (9 years of age and under).

While organizations have long tracked the demographics of their membership, understanding the demographics of social media users is no simple task. Each social media app reports their own demographic trends. Unfortunately, these statistics are not comparable because each company designs and releases their own statistics for marketing and business purposes (summary information from the Pew Research Center can be found in Resource Document E). Importantly, interviewed organizers were clear that while social media research can be a strong starting point, it is only useful if the research can be integrated with the organization's knowledge and understanding of their demographics (i.e., staff members and base) and social media use.

Learn about the subculture of each social media app.

Using social media to effectively reach, expand, and engage an organization's base requires knowledge of the sub-culture of each social media app. Different kinds of media (e.g., text, pictures, video) are used in different social media apps. For example, organizations aiming to engage younger folks recognized the importance of understanding "meme culture" on applications like **Twitter** and **Instagram**. But there is a subtlety to using memes, as explained by organizers from Californians for Justice:

"Even that idea of identifying memes, like spending a lot of time thinking about what memes can we identify? What's still hot and trending that isn't going to – that's going to translate well and not be too dorky, right?" – Californians for Justice

To the right is a meme, which includes an image and quote from a character from a popular TV show, that Student Voice posted to poke fun and criticize the placement of police officers in schools.

TikTok relies on content creators and "influencers" to attract attention, rather than relying on events or organizations. Producing successful content requires time, skill, and familiarity with the content.

Student Voice ✓
@stu_voice

Decisionmakers putting police in schools and not mental health counselors, social workers, or other support services #PoliceFreeSchools

I am going to create an environment that is so toxic,

8:27 PM · Jul 3, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

8 Retweets   **2** Quote Tweets   **23** Likes

Memes are images paired with text that follow a commonly understood joke structure.

According to Project VOYCE, using **TikTok** effectively starts by understanding that it is a youth-dominated online space. The Gen X program director at Project VOYCE talked about, among other things, a generational role distinction. They described it as ineffective for their organization's older leaders to post on TikTok. Rather, older staff were seen as being most effective in teaching younger youth organizers about the content of the work, i.e., education justice and healing, while empowering younger staff to use that knowledge to create effective TikToks consistent with the organization's message.

Another part of the sub-culture of each social media app is learning the amount of content to post. Organizers from Project VOYCE explained why they created a separate set of social media accounts for a civic-action campaign. They explained, "when we were working on the state policy, we really wanted people to be able to come back and see our work. [But] because… it's a highly saturated posting of… civics action content…we didn't want to overwhelm the main [Project VOYCE} page."

Undoubtedly, building familiarity with the subculture of online applications requires time to learn and navigate the apps, as well as noting the subtlety of engagement context by different groups. For more information about the different social media apps, see our companion report, _Digital Organizing: It's all about the apps_, and Digital Organizing Resource E: Social Media Apps at a Glance.

A **content creator** is someone who develops any kind of digital content – like video, photos, or text – either to advance their own identity as an influencer, their organization, and/or for profit. Influencers are one type of content creators. They are people with the ability to sway or influence hundreds of people by promoting or making recommendations on social media.

Remember social media is public!

Interviewed organizers drove home the message that social media feeds are **public**! Allies, opponents, the media, and the public at large can track an organization's work. An organizer from The Kentucky Student Voice Team spoke about purposefully keeping one project off social media until it was past the data collection phase so that political opponents didn't have the time to organize a counter-campaign. Instead, they engaged their base through private messaging, workflow apps, and shared drives.

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Building Narrative Power

Apps are extremely useful in helping organizations build their narrative power. Cohesive messaging and stories can either maintain or disrupt the status quo. Organizing groups with narrative power can shape how people interpret and talk about major social issues addressed in their campaigns.[c]

The Immigrant Rights Movement provides a well-known example of using narrative power to influence descriptive language and policies, over time. Young immigrants worked to shift public discourse from that of "illegal aliens" to "undocumented people." These organizers went further and reshaped the narrative of young immigrants as "Dreamers," hard working students who dream of accessing higher education.[d] Even more recently, this same community of activists has worked to shift language again, this time from a narrow focus on high achieving students to reclaiming broader civil rights language, in the "Immigrant Rights Movement."

Next, we describe the lessons organizers shared about using apps to build narrative power.

Narrative power is the power to influence stories that circulate in broader society.

Remember that apps can help your organization develop messages and gather statements quickly from your members.

Organizers often have very little time to develop a cohesive message around an emerging issue. Video meetings, shared but protected software spaces like a Google doc, and real time private messaging in apps like Slack or Google Chat, allow staff and organizational leaders to communicate their ideas quickly but also collaboratively, synchronously or asynchronously.

Once a cohesive message is developed, organizers can use the same tools to reach out to their base for public statements or testimony that aligns to the message. An organizer from The Kentucky Student Voice Team describes a time that the organization acted quickly to develop testimony when a state legislative committee attempted to overturn a school mask mandate during the height of COVID:

> "We created a press statement that night – literally staying up until 2:00 a.m. -- writing press statements to release the next morning, which is when that committee was supposed to convene. And then… we realized, 'hey, why don't we just go to the capital and testify?' So, I went to testify with another member of our team. And that was the first time we had met each other in person, but there was all of this online

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[c] This definition of narrative power is informed by the work that the Research Hub for Youth Organizing carried out with Funders Collaborative for Youth Organizing Pipelines to Power Initiative between 2018-2020.

[d] We featured this example on building narrative power in the Research Hub's Power Memo, a memo that was informed by our work with FCYO's Pipelines to Power Initiative.

Valladares, S., Kirshner, B., and Trejo, B. (January 2019). Power memo. University of Colorado Boulder.

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work preceding that. And it was probably the most convenient situation we were in, because we had everything, all of our resources were, in one space." — The Kentucky Student Voice Team

Knowing that certain issues regularly jump into the news cycle, some groups proactively create Slack channels or Google docs, for example, for different topics. Staff generate potential messages aligned to the organization's mission and goals, and then leaders can edit and revise them and add their own testimonies to the same channel or file. When a reporter reaches out to a member or staff, everyone can access both the topline message and direct quotes from community leaders. Using shared apps to create messages, particularly in advance, allows for democratic deliberation and creates an opportunity for more of the base to be quoted or mentioned publicly.

Know that messaging information for social media can be a balancing act.

Organizers explain that staying on mission in social media can be challenging for community organizing groups because social media favors sensationalized urgent messages rather than engagement in a long struggle. One strategy for addressing this tension is taking time as an organization to clarify the organization's mission and non-negotiables. For example, knowing that a 501(c)(3) cannot endorse a candidate or specific legislation is made clear by law, but knowing how and when an organization wants to acknowledge an emerging issue outside of the their areas of focus is much more nuanced. Another part of the balancing act is knowing that reposting any social media from official accounts will be perceived as an endorsement. So, it is important that the people making the decisions for the organizational accounts have a set of approved principles to follow. Organizers emphasized consistently staying true to an organization's mission and values instead of posting simplified content that may get more attention but less long-term commitment.

Create both an internal and external communications toolkit

As discussed in the base-building section, social media apps are extremely useful for sharing messages. However, not every part of an organization's base is active on social media, and not every message should be shared with the public. Thus, organizers explained they developed both internal and external communication toolkits in their work. The internal toolkits are saved in password protected spaces and organizers used email, text, and protected workflow apps to share them with multiple people at once.

External toolkits allow base members to easily access language and messaging that keeps organizational messaging cohesive. Unlike internal materials, these public-facing toolkits have less information and aim to keep messaging simple and clear. For example, they might include sample tweets for Twitter, text for Facebook, or a graphic for Facebook or Instagram for members and allies to post from their own accounts.

Create a shared calendar that aligns communications with other organizational work.
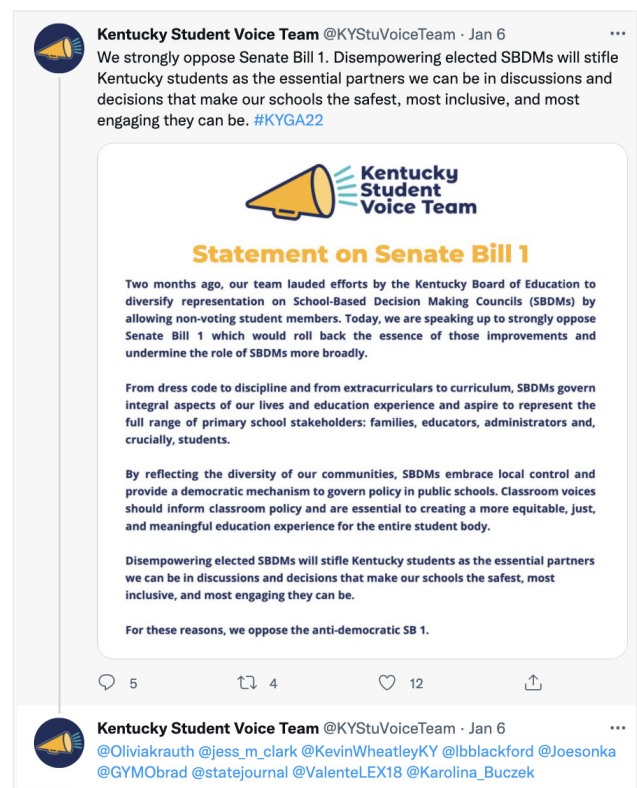
Organizers used a shared calendar app like Google Calendar to create and edit organization-wide communication calendars. Interviewed organizers explain that on a day-to-day basis it is important to be selective about how much you communicate with your leadership, your base, and the broader public. For example, at Project Voyce, organizers coordinate days of the week to communicate about different topics (e.g., program work versus political campaigns versus fundraising) on social media. This allows all parts of their team time to get external attention without overwhelming their target audiences. Additionally, the shared calendar allows organizations to align communications activities with the rest of the organization's work.

Execute cross-posting and tagging, which can help your team reach your organizing targets.

In the "Information Age," getting a message out to the broader public, to the media, or to elected officials requires that the same message appear in a variety of spaces. A critical strategy for amplifying messages is having multiple people cross-post the same message on different applications and in different venues. This requires that everyone (i.e., those reaching out to traditional print or radio media, allied community leaders, and/or elected officials, as well as organizers posting on social media) have access to and use the same shared toolkit.

Having a team of communications staff and volunteers (rather than a single person) who are ready to share a message with diverse audiences is also helpful. While a communications director can utilize known relationships with local media or elected officials, the broader team should include individuals with a large and influential group of followers on social media. The idea is that the information the organization posts will align with that posted by other members using their personal accounts. Importantly, organizers emphasize that the sub-culture of each social media app means that messages need to be unique and appropriate for the space, while maintaining a clear message and organizational vision.

The ability to tag the accounts of public officials, reporters, and others provides a powerful tool for community organizers to directly access and even get quick responses from people with social and institutional power. Staff at Californians for Justice shared that Twitter allows them to get the "ear of educators, of administrators, of policy people who are generating the [policy] content." Similarly, in the **Tweet** to the right from Kentucky Student Voice, we note that after tweeting their statement, Kentucky Student

Kentucky Student Voice Team @KYStuVoiceTeam · Jan 6
We strongly oppose Senate Bill 1. Disempowering elected SBDMs will stifle Kentucky students as the essential partners we can be in discussions and decisions that make our schools the safest, most inclusive, and most engaging they can be. #KYGA22

Kentucky Student Voice Team

Statement on Senate Bill 1

Two months ago, our team lauded efforts by the Kentucky Board of Education to diversify representation on School-Based Decision Making Councils (SBDMs) by allowing non-voting student members. Today, we are speaking up to strongly oppose Senate Bill 1 which would roll back the essence of those improvements and undermine the role of SBDMs more broadly.

From dress code to discipline and from extracurriculars to curriculum, SBDMs govern integral aspects of our lives and education experience and aspire to represent the full range of primary school stakeholders: families, educators, administrators and, crucially, students.

By reflecting the diversity of our communities, SBDMs embrace local control and provide a democratic mechanism to govern policy in public schools. Classroom voices should inform classroom policy and are essential to creating a more equitable, just, and meaningful education experience for the entire student body.

Disempowering elected SBDMs will stifle Kentucky students as the essential partners we can be in discussions and decisions that make our schools the safest, most inclusive, and most engaging they can be.

For these reasons, we oppose the anti-democratic SB 1.

5   4   12

Kentucky Student Voice Team @KYStuVoiceTeam · Jan 6
@Oliviakrauth @jess_m_clark @KevinWheatleyKY @lbblackford @Joesonka @GYMObrad @statejournal @ValenteLEX18 @Karolina_Buczek

Voice then immediately responds to their own tweet by tagging (entering the usernames/handles of) prominent education journalists in the state, to reach decision makers.

Inspiring Action

Community organizers aim to do more than just spread a message, they aim to inspire people to take collective action to change social injustice. Such action is long and hard and requires much more than a one-time act, conversation, or social media post. The following are strategies for inspiring action.

Create "activation seeds" in multiple places.

In her work, James[3] discusses "activation seeds" or nodes of content, diversely placed, which maximize the possibility of recruitment and engagement. James found that it is possible to build personalized connections through engagement in online applications. These multiple activation points are the seeds for expanding an organization's reach, identifying allies and supporters, and advancing both the short-term and long-term goals of an organization. Thinking about how these different activation seeds are connected is important. An organizer from Showing Up for Racial Justice explained how they did this when asking their base to sign up for a phone bank for a local sheriff election:

> "...the first thing I would probably do is make a graphic for email. Send out the email for this phone bank. I would post it on Instagram, and I would post it on… Facebook and Twitter as well. But what I would also do is, people need to see something a couple of times. So, on Twitter I would have – spent a couple of days where I'm talking about the stakes of the race and stakes for that campaign and why it's important, why people should care."

As explained by Showing Up for Racial Justice, creating a narrative on **Twitter** about the importance of the issue helps people understand the "ask" of signing up for a phone bank. The Showing Up for Racial Justice Twitter thread here demonstrates how to provide context and urgency around an invitation to join their organizations.

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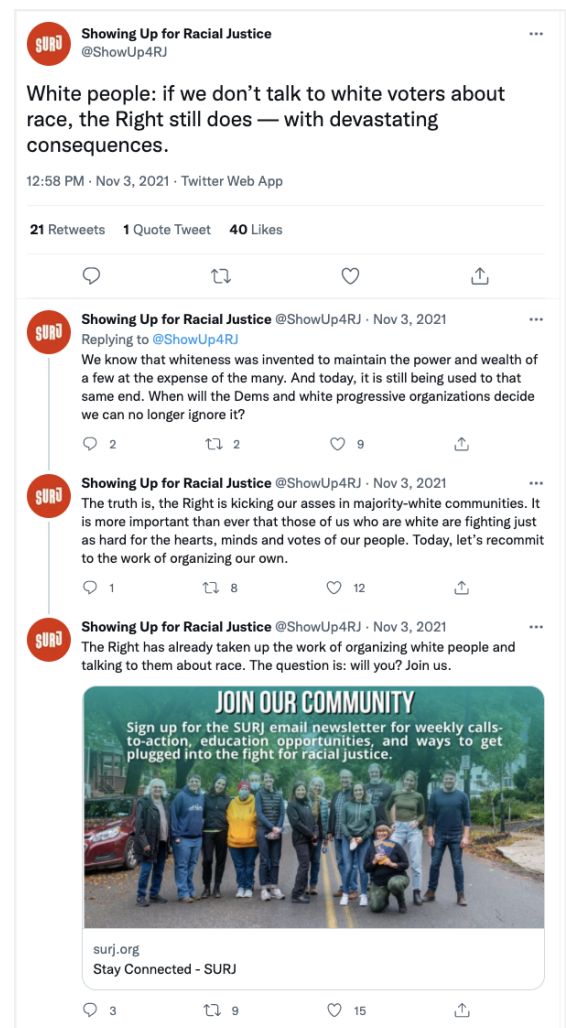
Multiple touch points take intentional planning. An organizer from Together Colorado explained that their legislative campaign began by inviting people by email, social media posts, and a paid Facebook ad to a Zoom event. After the event, they used the same applications to get event attendees to sign up for specific tasks. This coordinated set of activities ensured maximum reach and participation.

Create videos which are powerful.

Videos that are professionally produced, videos quickly captured on a mobile phone, or recordings of previous events can reach different audiences with deeper information. A communications consultant from the Partnership for the Future of Learning pointed to the "massive subscriber lists" on YouTube, and a digital organizer from Together Colorado mentioned using other social media applications to direct people to YouTube content. In this sense, watching a video on YouTube actually becomes an action. People can learn about your organization by witnessing your work. Videos allow people to learn about your organization and then search for more detailed information online. It is important to think strategically about videos being stories that allow people to lean into your work, rather than explaining absolutely everything about a campaign or issue.

Amplify your allies.

True social movements are not about a single organization, rather they are about several organizations coalescing around an issue to create change. Organizations are working more and more strategically across networks to share information with allies. For example, as a network of many different organizations, the Partnership for the Future of Learning engages Ambassadors to share information about their own organization as it relates to a network priority. In addition, they have listservs across the network where each organization can share campaign and event announcements and ask allies to repost information on their own communications channels. The act of reposting an ally's work takes little time and can help build the collective power of a movement. For example, here is a screenshot of a video created by Alianza NORCO and shared via Facebook. The video thanks allies for collaborating on a campaign to help immigrants get driving licenses.

Alianza NORCO
April 13 · 🌐

Thank you to fellow communities across Colorado who helped make this happen!.

You can find a complete list of community organizations that are ready to help you apply for a license by visiting the DMV page:
bit.ly/CO-Manejo-ONG

NORCO Alliance continues to fight for equality in the licensing service. Little by little we see how our struggle is not in vain.

Call us to help you with your license (970) 703-3945

#coloradoimmigrant #undocumented #DACA #YoManejoColorado #IDriveColorado #idriveco #licenciascolorado

⚙ · See original · Rate this translation

Using Apps to Build and Sustain Organizational Capacity

Apps are as useful for building and sustaining an organization as they are for building power. However, in the ever-changing technological world, it is hard to know which apps to use and when and how to use them. This section focuses on three major strategies and the lessons within them. In the table below, we show the strategies for building and sustaining organizational capacity.

Organizing Goals	Strategies	Lessons
Build and Sustain Organizational Capacity	Choosing the right apps for your organization's staff and base	• Be honest about your organization's digital expertise and be intentional about learning. • Consider cellular and internet reliability. • Use apps to democratize information access.
	Approaching digital organizing with curiosity, creativity, and flexibility	• Create digital spaces which can expand diversity and engagement. • Bring your organization's values and goals into digital spaces. • Build community across distance.
	Integrating digital tools and communications across the organization	• Use digital tools across the organization, not just for one goal. • Communicate fundraising as essential and promote with frequent exchange of ideas. • Provide professional development on apps.

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Choosing the right apps for your organization's staff and base.

From project planning to scheduling and communicating, there are many application options but not all of them will be right for your team. For example, some organizers reach their members by phone call or text because internet access is limited, while others use web-based messaging apps like WhatsApp to speak with members who don't have cellular access or have limited cellular data plans. Below we review some of the key lessons shared by organizers.

Be honest about your organization's digital expertise and be intentional about learning.

Take time to learn about the apps that leaders and members already have and how they use them. If they already use apps at work or in school, it will be easier to use these apps within an organization. If an organization's base includes lots of people who eagerly try out new technology, then the leaders might be able to consider more options than an organization with a less tech-interested base. Each app has its own strengths and limitations including cost, ability to work offline, security, style and design (see examples in *Digital Organizing: It's all about the apps*). It is important to think about and discuss the needs and strengths of staff and leaders before switching from one app to the other, to avoid unnecessary time and financial costs. Don't assume that everyone will switch apps easily, rather, build ownership of the selection of a new app. Several organizers shared experiences where one staff member wanted to try a new app but couldn't get the rest of the organization to use it.

Consider cellular and internet reliability.

Every community has different internet and cellular access, so it is important to know how issues of connectivity and access will impact the work of an organization and its leaders. An organizer from Showing Up for Racial Justice explained how issues of access led them to rely on Slack and social media which uses less data than Zoom. "...when I was working with coworkers in Appalachia, where they have less reliable Internet…they were extremely responsive on Slack or on social media, but maybe had a hard time getting on Zoom." Other organizers mentioned the lack of cellular access in urban neighborhoods.

Use Apps to democratize information access.

If used well and universally across the organization, apps can help democratize access to information. Organizers at Student Voice explained that shared access allows more people to engage in and feel ownership of the work. But it is also important to develop principles for how and when people are added to shared spaces like Slack or Google Drive or a donor database like EveryAction and to consider when or if people should have their access removed. Thinking about how to balance inclusivity and privacy is important, especially when considering private information or donations. Developing plans for what to do when someone violates the

security of an organization's shared space or is simply no longer volunteering with the organization, allows the group to be consistent in practice.

Approach digital organizing with curiosity, creativity, and flexibility.

Organizers are always developing new ways to approach the work of building power and capacity just as app developers are always developing new tools. Interviewees talked about approaching digital organizing with curiosity, creativity, and flexibility to maximize its potential. We share key lessons here.

Create digital spaces which can expand diversity and engagement.

Though COVID is the catalyst, and the change from in-person to online organizing is not without its challenges, interviewed organizers are finding the benefits. Organizers from Together Colorado and Student Voice, spoke about video and hybrid meetings to increase engagement across different communities and expand both the diversity and numbers of people engaged in their work. Together Colorado explains, "we're much more representative of the entire state now than we were when we had a lot more in-person meetings in Denver."

Bring your organization's values and goals into digital spaces.

Organizers aim to both create change around social issues and support the development of those with whom they work. During the pandemic Project VOYCE leaders applied this goal to their digital meetings, aiming to get work done, and to allow young people to connect:

> "We really - deliberately actually - wanted to create our coalition through Zoom because we know that things are unstable and unpredictable right now. And we didn't want Project VOYCE to be another thing in their life that had to go from in-person to digital. We wanted to already be something that, if stuff goes left and we all have to do everything virtual, they're already in it with us, and we're already doing this work."

Also consistent with their organizational goals, Project VOYCE used Zoom to create healing spaces. In the words of one organizer, "We're still exploring what a healing-justice framework looks like in digital space. [Even though Zoom] hasn't been healing for many of the adults who are leading it." With rising mental health concerns for youth and adults, creating healing spaces online is a new strategy for creating spaces of support and renewal rather than burnout.

Build community across distance.

Since inception, the Internet has been an exceptionally powerful tool in helping people build relationships across distances. Organizers from Showing Up for Racial Justice and Kentucky Student Voice explained that this is still very much the case when using digital tools in organizing. Organizers from both groups described how Slack

channels provide a means of connecting with leaders and allies interested in the same issue regardless of geographic location. Similarly, many organizations have a "watercooler" channel on Slack that is meant for casual conversations that might happen beside the water cooler at an in-person office.

Integrate digital tools and communications across the organization.

Digital organizing is more than just communicating a message through social media. Effective digital organizing requires a team approach in thinking about how to use a range of apps across all areas of their mission. An integrated approach ensures that there is shared responsibility, an ability to shift with changing conditions, and long-term buy-in for online organizing. It also means that communications should not be isolated to one person or one team, rather everyone needs to be trained in how to use digital tools and how to communicate effectively.

Use digital tools across the organization, not just for one goal

As apps allow for more and more integration of data, there are new opportunities for leaders to break the traditional silos (e.g., education, organizing, human resources, development) of their organizations and work together. This applies not just to coordinating activities but also communicating about them externally. Social media also allows every member of the team to help communicate about their work. Having members of your team that have a large social media following is a new kind of capital for community organizations to creatively use.

Communicate fundraising as essential and promote with frequent exchange of ideas.

Californians for Justice organizers use Facebook for fundraising more than they use it to reach new youth members. Acknowledging that their approach to digital organizing is a classic communications perspective with audiences and that each platform has different audiences, Californians for Justice strives for an integrated approach across their work. "We want to be able to integrate a digital strategy in our base building and our leadership development work…[and] fundraising." To the right, we provide one more example of how Together Colorado's Facebook Post aims to drive traffic to their website.

Together Colorado
December 30, 2021 · 🌐

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has dedicated time, energy, and money to organize for our beautiful tomorrow in 2021. We're so grateful for our powerful community leaders, faith leaders, and partner organizations.

As we wrap up the year, we are also asking for your financial support. Please consider donating to Together Colorado by visiting www.togethercolorado.org/donate.

2021 BY THE NUMBERS
TOGETHER COLORADO

1,202	399K	9,000	11	501
Letters to Legislators	Text Messages Sent	Campaign Fliers Distributed	Leaders Gave Testimony at the Capitol	Faith Leader Signatures

👍 3

Provide professional development on apps.

Organizers explain that it is valuable to take time to teach an organization's base and staff how to use new digital technologies. Planned training allows everyone to become a learner and normalizes the process of testing and exploring new technologies. The benefit is that new apps integrate into the regular work of the organization. Organizers at Alianza NORCO took time for their base to learn about using Zoom as their primary meeting app, which in turn, allowed Alianza NORCO to be successful across several campaign efforts.

Conclusion: The Dynamic Nature of Digital Organizing

Technology is always changing and evolving. Effective digital organizing requires a growth mindset, being a constant learner, loving the challenge of something new but also collaborating with peers and creatively innovating new solutions. These traits, fortunately, abound in strong community organizers.

When we set out to write this report, we thought that we could create a "how to" guide that would support organizers to quickly match their knowledge and needs to a specific social media, communication, or work productivity app. What we learned from organizers is that using apps well is much more complicated than simply identifying the right application. Understanding your organizational goals, your multiple audiences (among your base and your targets), and your technological capacity are key to successfully organizing online.

Using social media effectively, for example, may require proactively creating a variety of posts for different applications in a planned manner - rather than choosing the app whose demographic reach matches best to the majority of the organization's base. It is helpful to experiment with different media, with different posts, and then make use of analytics from the apps or companion apps like HootSuite, to track impact.

Effective digital organizing requires integrating technology and apps across the different parts of an organization, building buy-in, and then working as a community to learn and innovate. This seemingly overwhelming task can be divided into manageable parts – an organization can start by selecting one of the strategies presented here, along with some of the lessons shared by their peers. To sustain the work of digital organizing long term, organizations must invest in leaders and

organizers. A constant reassessment of who can take on learning something new (perhaps based on roles, training, or interests) is also important, as context and people change. For example, the Human Resources and Fundraising Directors might collaborate to explore a new app like EveryAction, while the political action team might experiment by engaging a youth leadership board in creating TikToks that reflect campaign goals. There is an old saying that a database is only as good as the information you put into it. It seems the same is true across these apps– they are only as good as the people using them to innovate, create, and advance social change.

> **What we learned from organizers is that using apps well is much more complicated than simply identifying the right application. Understanding your organizational goals, your multiple audiences (among your base and your targets), and your technological capacity are key to successfully organizing online.**

Endnotes

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