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DIGITAL DEMOCRACY PORTFOLIO   JULY 2023

2023 LEARNING CONVERSATIONS

Background

In December 2022, the Digital Democracy Portfolio (DDP) shared an updated strategy that works toward an inclusive, multiracial democracy in the United States where civil and human rights online are respected and grounded in an equitable civic infrastructure that is open, just, resilient, and trustworthy. To help set a baseline for their new strategy, the DDP team engaged ORS Impact to conduct learning conversations with five groups of DDP grantees to **understand the current state of the media and technology policy field and facilitate real-time learning among grantees.** During the conversations, we used open-ended questions and Zoom polls to ask grantees about three key areas:

- **Coordination** in the field

- The network of **state and local advocates** in the field

- If and how the field is considering and/or engaging in **narrative and cultural change** strategies

Background

The following slide is an outcome map that visualizes the strategies, short and long-term outcomes, and ultimate impact that DDP hopes to achieve. To identify the three key areas for this year's learning conversations, DDP staff prioritized outcomes from the outcome map (noted with stars).

Digital Democracy Portfolio

EQUITABLE CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

> Federal Policy Development and Advocacy | State and Local Organizing | Narrative and Communications Capacity

CIVIL + HUMAN RIGHTS ONLINE

> Litigation and Legal Analysis | Coalitions and Campaigns | Public Accountability for Digital Harms

FEDERAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND ADVOCACY
- Growth of a diverse and innovative media and tech policy field
- Increased coordination among the media and tech policy advocacy field ★
- Increased representation of those most affected by media policies in the field
- Increased alignment around a policy agenda

STATE + LOCAL ORGANIZING
- Growth of a diverse network of leaders and advocates in state and local jurisdictions ★
- Development of a "bench" of advocates working on local policies and regulations for an equitable civic infrastructure
- Advancement of visionary new policies at the local level
- Testing and learning of new regulations at the local level

NARRATIVE + COMMUNICATION CAPACITY
- More and new narrative change strategies are created
- Advocates are better equipped with engaging and innovative narrative and cultural change strategies

LITIGATION + LEGAL ANALYSIS
- More transparency and testing of novel applications of civil rights law
- Increased understanding of harms perpetuated by platforms
- Legislative wins that are challenged in courts are defended and upheld
- People facing legal challenges from platforms are supported

COALITIONS + CAMPAIGNS
- Development of strong federal-state connections on civil rights issues ★
- Community organizations strengthen their campaigning, communications, and narrative change efforts

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DIGITAL HARMS
- New innovative campaigns that target advertisers, stockholders, board members, and users
- Advocates are better equipped with narrative and cultural change strategies to respond rapidly to harms that platforms create ★

FEDERAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND ADVOCACY
- Expansion of public funding to grow public media, repair past harms, and address longstanding inequalities in media ownership
- Establishment of clear non-discrimination guardrails in online spaces
- Increased access to the internet among the public

STATE AND LOCAL ORGANIZING
- Transformation of civic infrastructure at the local level
- Increased pressure on federal policymakers to take action on proven models

NARRATIVE AND COMMUNICATION CAPACITY
- The baseline of what is possible is shifted in advocates media and policy frameworks

LITIGATION AND LEGAL ANALYSIS
- Platforms are held liable under current law
- Policymakers recognize that current law is insufficient
- Policymakers are motivated to act on laws that hold platforms accountable

COALITIONS AND CAMPAIGNS
- Community organizations have the capacity to grow their power
- Community organizations have the capacity to inoculate their base against disinformation
- Community organizations have the capacity to deploy impactful organizing and messaging efforts

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DIGITAL HARMS
- More people become aware of the need for improved practices and public policy for platform accountability
- More people are brought into the movement for platform accountability

A movement led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color has created sustained public and political support for policy that ensures equitable access to the news and information services Americans need to thrive. As a result, Americans increasingly benefit from the potential of media and technology as a force to advance an inclusive, multi-racial democracy

Social media companies are constrained by robust legal, policy, and public accountability efforts led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color, focused on safeguarding civil and human rights protections. As a result, the internet is becoming a more vibrant and welcoming place, where discrimination, hate, and misinformation are on the decline.

Black, Indigenous, and people of color create, access, and enjoy media and technology that fully and equitable represents their needs, concerns, and dreams. As a result, America's public square becomes more inclusive and contributes to a thriving pro-democracy movement.

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COORDINATION

Coordination

As reflected in its new strategy, DDP believes that increased coordination between members in the media and technology policy field will result in increased alignment on a policy agenda that advances the goals of Democracy Fund.

To better understand the current state of coordination, **we asked grantees to describe how/where they perceive coordination occurring (or not), their experiences coordinating with others, and what it would take to improve coordination in the field moving forward.**

As the intersectionality of tech issues grows, so too do the added layers of complexity and coordination.

One finding echoed across most learning conversations was an **increased interest in technology issues as people begin to more fully understand how tech intersects with other issue areas.** Grantees now find *"democracy groups, rights groups, consumer protection groups,"** and others interested and engaged in technology policy where they hadn't been before. As a result, the breadth of issues that grantees are taking on has expanded, and with that comes *"additional layers of coordination and coalitions, and formations of people."*
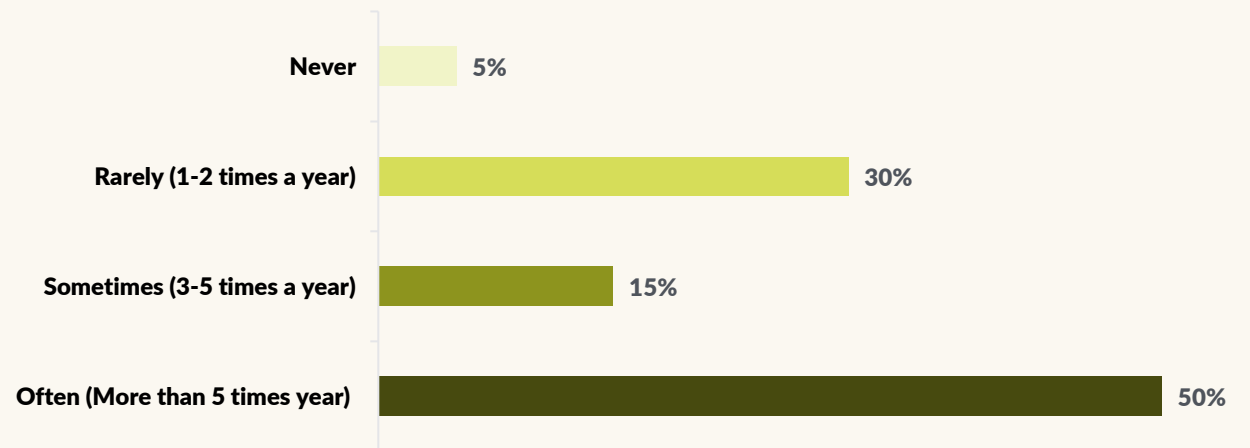
While this growth and interest in the field is generally perceived as a net positive, with more organizations and actors becoming engaged, grantees recognized that **this increases the amount of meetings and attempts at coordination that are happening:** *"**I think the number of meetings with people has grown exponentially over the past few years….**"* For one grantee, the number of issue areas the field engages in was a challenge in itself: *"The challenge is that what we are trying to do as a field is so huge and effects every aspect of our lives."*

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Half of grantees shared that they attended unprompted (non-funder generated) meetings or convenings more than five times a year.

These interactions and convenings ranged in scope and scale. Many grantees shared that they had been invited to or attended new coalition spaces, many researchers shared examples of being called upon to share their expertise (or they called upon others to ensure that their research was relevant to folks working on the ground), and grantees involved in narrative change strategies described finding new venues or opportunities to apply their particular lens or perspective.

Frequency of DDP grantees engaged in unprompted meetings or convenings in the past year (n=20)

Category	Percentage
Never	5%
Rarely (1-2 times a year)	30%
Sometimes (3-5 times a year)	15%
Often (More than 5 times year)	50%

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However, there was also a sentiment that while attempts at increased coordination were happening, not all attempts were helpful.

Grantees shared that, at times, advocacy efforts around tech or media policy efforts feel uncoordinated or out of alignment, despite an increase in meetings and convenings. **For some, current attempts at coordination feel surface-level and unsatisfying, particularly if it felt like a funder-driven goal, with no tangible outcomes beyond coordination for coordination's sake:** *"Coordination for its own sake can be frustrating when there is a donor desire for more coordination. But if it doesn't make sense or drive us to expend resources on coordination at the expense of impact, that is a donor-driven goal."*

Funder-driven convenings also posed other challenges, most notably barriers to inclusivity, as a discrete set of funded organizations may not include all the right or necessary organizations to move a particular issue forward. These efforts can be unsatisfying if *"not all the people we need in a particular conversation are there."* Funder-driven models also have the potential to cement attention on an issue, even when the grantees see a need to pivot. As one grantee noted, *"We can still get caught in the middle of pivoting when we still have another [funder-driven] fight we are focusing on."*

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Grantees recognized the success of some funder-driven convenings and coalitions.

Despite frustration with some funder-driven coordination efforts, **grantees recognized that many of the successful coordination efforts they engaged in had been spurred by funder interests and investment.** Funder-driven models can be helpful because they *"can mobilize resources"* and *"create a moment of consensus."* As one grantee explained, *"There are a lot of organizations doing a lot of different things, but not a lot of collaboration unless there's a big entity or funder that takes the initiative to bring folks together."*

Some grantees suggested it would be most helpful to have persistent venues for principled debate and education to *"hash out disagreements"* and find areas of alignment. Some attempts to coordinate ended up with people *"resurfacing the same types of conversations"* in different venues, and grantees are interested in funder support to avoid that redundancy.

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Despite a desire for increased alignment, grantees acknowledged that lock-step alignment on every issue is not a realistic expectation.

While the lack of an aligned policy agenda is viewed as an impediment to progress, **grantees in two conversations acknowledged that lock-step alignment on every issue or campaign was unrealistic.** In successful movement building, one grantee explained, you need *"someone at the fringe that is tugging at the edges...advancing a radical idea"* in the same space as those *"trying to push what's politically winnable."*

These different roles will have disagreements, but rather than amplify those tensions, increased coordination could come from understanding the space that an organization fills in the advocacy ecosystem and understanding why they may align on some issues and operate in opposition on others.

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Ultimately, many grantees advocated for sustained investment in the long game.

Many grantees described feeling as though **the field is engaging in *"reactive efforts as opposed to proactive efforts,"* and that this leaves *"a lot of unrealized potential"* on the table.** To shift toward a more offensive and proactive agenda, grantees recognized the need for sustained investment in the long game.

When reflecting on where they have seen successful coordination efforts, grantees noted the long arcs of coordination and activity that were necessary. One named the Martha Wright-Reed Act as an example of *"organizations and coalitions coming together and staying the course"* to produce a policy win after ten years of work. Similarly, grantees in another conversation observed that some of the effective collaborations or coordinating efforts they've been a part of came from coalitions that formed on *"legacy issues"* like copyright or net neutrality that have been around longer, built more infrastructure, and continued to be effective even as funder interest has waned.

To have the relationships and space to build out offensive strategies and work toward more proactive engagement also requires sustained investment in those causes. As one grantee shared, *"Money creates time."*

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Moving forward, grantees offered a variety of possible solutions or experiments that could increase coordination and alignment in the field.

Grantees in two conversations **suggested having representatives from a subset of established and significant coalitions in the field come together and discuss high-level strategy.** They acknowledged it would add yet another meeting, but could be a space for *"a broader strategy discussion with leaders from various groups."*

Two other grantees also reported success leaning into a ***"switchboard operator"* or connector role,** where they used their understanding of others in the field to make connections between organizations working toward similar aims but who may not know each other. Explicitly funding an organization to fill this role could improve coordination in the long term.

Grantees from one conversation also envision **a new model for collaboration where a funder initially invests in convening a set of actors but steps away after the initial investment,** providing those at the table more flexibility and independence in whom to include and what issues to prioritize moving forward.

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Others suggested engaging in a more robust mapping of the field or funding opportunities for knowledge exchange.

For some grantees, better coordination comes from a better understanding of who is in the field and the different issues that each actor is working on: *"…I know there is more knowledge out there, there's more tables out there that I'm just not as privy to and if there could be like a general mapping of what the issues they're working on."* Similarly, another grantee noted that with a better understanding of the field and one's own role within it, *"we could coordinate and think expansively about how all the pieces fit together."*

Different organizations hold skill sets and expertise that others lack. For example, some traditional tech policy groups have expertise around content regulation or First Amendment law, but they have gaps in knowledge around the direct or immediate needs of movement actors. Conversely, organizations working on tech policy could provide that knowledge, but lack the expertise in other areas. **To address these knowledge gaps and leverage the expertise in the field, grantees in multiple conversations shared a desire for convenings to create space for knowledge exchange.**

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STATE + LOCAL
ADVOCACY

State and Local Advocacy

In past years' learning conversations, grantees have shared finding some success in policy change at the state and local levels. And in its new strategy, DDP is putting an explicit focus on state and local advocacy.

To help inform this part of the strategy moving forward, we asked grantees **how robust and diverse they felt the current network of advocates working on media and tech policy at the state and local levels is,** the extent to which there were **strong connections between those advocates and those working at the federal level,** and what it would take to improve state and local advocacy moving forward.
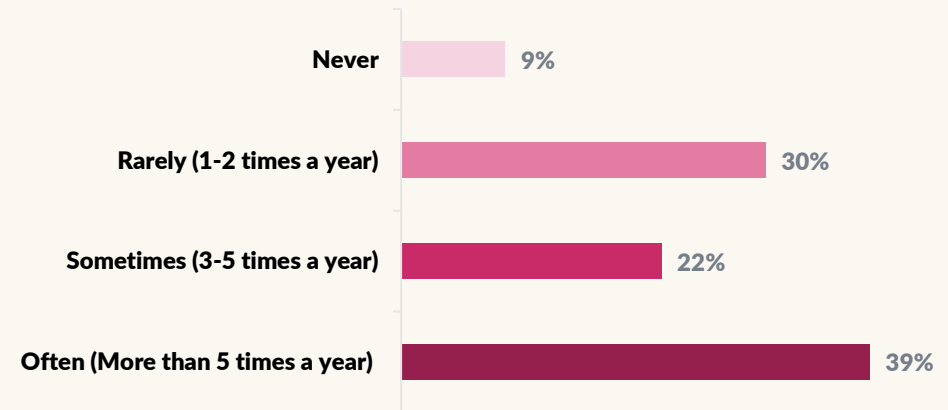
Most grantees reported collaborating or coordinating with advocates at the state or local levels at least once in the past year.

Not all grantees in these conversations are advocates, nor do they have explicit state- or local-level strategies, but **connections were still being made.** Some grantees mentioned that they would hear from different advocacy groups in different states based on their areas of expertise while others noted that even if they collaborated with state and local advocates frequently, it was often with the same groups around the same issues (e.g., organizations collaborating only on content moderation), highlighting an opportunity for more networked collaboration.

Frequency of DDP grantees collaborating with advocates in the state and local levels in the past year (n=23)

Category	Percentage
Never	9%
Rarely (1-2 times a year)	30%
Sometimes (3-5 times a year)	22%
Often (More than 5 times a year)	39%

In describing *how* they engaged with advocates at the state and local level, grantees filled numerous technical or supportive roles.

Grantees shared a range of roles they play with state and local advocates, **with many providing technical expertise for a particular issue, providing input on strategy, or connecting state and local advocates with others in the field working on similar issues.** Among some of the examples noted:

- Some larger organizations have state chapters that help to focus and advance their organization's issue areas. In this model, state chapters reach out to their national-level counterparts and ask for feedback, policy recommendations, or advice if there is a problematic bill emerging in their state.

- Others try to build out local efforts in particular regions by supporting/expanding the capacity of those already working on technology and media issues at the local level.

- Some researchers or content experts also reported being contacted by state attorneys general or other legislative offices to provide technical expertise directly.

Most grantees described their interactions with state and local advocates as *"reactive."*

Similar to the finding around reactive vs. proactive coordination in the field, grantees shared that when they engage with advocates at the state and local level, it is usually in reaction to a bad bill being introduced rather than a proactive effort: *"Three out of four times, four out of five times, it feels like it's stopping bad things."* Grantees explained that when state-level work is largely defensive in nature, there is no space or time to think through proactive strategy.

The exception to this theme was along the coasts, where grantees described proactive efforts in New York and California. These two states have received more investment and attention, and have larger, more diverse advocacy ecosystems. *"The field, from my perspective, the majority of the work on tech policy has gone into California, has gone into New York. Most of the other states have been left out of the discussion unless there was one off-hand issue here or there."*

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Grantees recognized and appreciated the interplay between state/local and federal advocacy, but also noted it can cause tensions.

For many nationally focused advocates, the impetus for engaging in state and local advocacy is in service of *"advancing a national goal"* or using the states as a *"proving ground"* for policies or models that could be implemented at a larger scale. Similarly, grantees sometimes feel compelled to engage in states where bad bills are moving because they may negatively impact federal policy. Across these purposes, engagement at the state level is still in the interest of national priorities. However, for state and local advocates, they *"care passionately about the people in their states and that is their priority first and foremost."*

Different groups of advocates often share common interests and can work toward common goals, but the different levels of focus sometimes can cause tension. One group of grantees discussed how some in the field pushed for the federal American Data Privacy and Protection Act, recognizing that it could advance certain rights and protections for a large swath of people that didn't have them. Yet, many state and local advocates in California were in opposition to the bill because it could potentially undermine some of the gains they had secured in a state-level policy.

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Staffing, resources, and relationships are the most common barriers that grantees face when engaging in state and local advocacy work.

Each state comes with its own distinct politics, rules and regulations, and agenda. As a result, state and local advocacy requires engaging a distinct strategy for each state. **It takes time and resources to develop the right relationships with state agenda setters, learn and navigate each state's legislative process and lobbying rules, and keep a pulse to know when policy windows might open.** For many grantees, it would not be sustainable to operate in each state, nor do they feel that there are advocates focused on tech in each state that they could partner with.

Many grantees also shared that they were often getting beat at the state level because industry opposition is strong, well-resourced, and better able to engage in each state. In one example, a grantee shared that when working on legislation in Arizona, Apple hired nearly every contract lobbyist in the state overnight.

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To improve state and local advocacy efforts, grantees offered some suggestions.

First, **grantees encourage funders to recognize that strategic state and local advocacy is a long-term play that requires sustained commitment**. Grantees pointed to the New Jersey Public Media Fund as a testament to this. Originally introduced in 2017 and passed in 2019, similar legislation is now being shared with federal legislators in 2023.

Another grantee shared how **they are trying to find ways to show up where state agendas are being formulated**. One such venue was working with associations that hold influence across states, like the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. Grantees in multiple conversations also called on larger civil rights organizations with local and state chapters to increase their knowledge on more meaningfully engaging in technology policy.

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NARRATIVE + CULTURAL CHANGE

Narrative and Cultural Change

Adopting narrative and culture change frameworks is a central part of DDP's new strategy. By promoting narratives that support a more robust public image for more equitable media and information ecosystems, the belief is that the baseline of what is possible in advocates' media and policy frameworks shifts. But DDP knows that not all grantees match this focus and prioritization on narrative and culture change. For some, it's *"core to [their] mission,"* while for others, *"it's a work in progress."*

To better understand the current state and implementation of narrative and culture change among grantees, **we asked them to describe how their organizations approach narrative change work and to reflect on broader themes they see in the field.**

Grantees conveyed rich contours of narrative and culture change that were often interconnected with the stakes at hand.

Throughout the learning conversations, grantees shared rich frames of narrative and culture change that called for centering communities most impacted. Importantly, grantees noted a focal point around storytelling and narratives, particularly for Black and Indigenous communities: *"Getting **more control over who, what, where, and when is told about our community is imperative** because what is being told to and about our community is creating huge roadblocks for the advancement of our community, and quite candidly, it's one of the things that's fracturing our fragile democracy. We see it in the polarization. We see it in the cultural wars. ... every sector of society is impacted by it, and I view BIPOC media as being sort of the guardians at the rail."*

One grantee noted the importance of audience and centering community when developing this work: *"We think about our members and the communities that our members represent."* It's not just narratives *"for us and by us"* but *"amplifying the principle that race matters in the study, understanding, mobilization of technology, and not only does it matter but to centralize it and center it in the work that we do. **What happens when we really center race as a central factor, ... when we center people, communities, researchers of color in trying to understand this ecosystem of technology and tech policy."***

Central to understanding the scope of narrative and cultural change is its links to and reliance on popular media and Big Tech.

While centering community is part of the answer to narrative and culture change frameworks, grantees expressed an inherent tension with popular media and Big Tech. Perhaps most central to the scope and current state of narrative and culture change is that *"a part of the paradigm shift is it's so reliant on [popular] media"* and Big Tech.

Several grantees pinpointed that **it is not just the people that use the platforms, but the fraught nature of the platforms themselves.** One grantee expressed that *"fundamentally, socio-technological systems that now mediate public conversations, those systems themselves are not only a part of the problem, but they're a big component. It's not just the bad people doing bad things on Facebook… it's the technological systems themselves."*

Central to understanding the scope of narrative and cultural change is its links to and reliance on popular media and Big Tech. (continued)

Some grantees discussed popular media, primarily focused on the proliferation of streaming services. This type of popular media generates critical insights into the stories' content and who is creating them. One grantee summarized: *"The importance of popular media and having stories… spaces and places where compelling, smart, and realistic stories are told because we can do all the awareness around policy issues and harms… but if we're not telling stories that are truly resonant with people and in ways that are rooted in people's lived experiences and are entertaining and compelling and questioning, then it doesn't matter."*

Further, one grantee outlined the ultimate impacts of narrative and culture change work: *"The purpose of doing it is good stories;* ***good narrative is about kind of shaping who are the protagonists and antagonists.*** *So in our work, what we want to do is redefine who is the we, who is the they, … who belongs and who is marginalized. I think we get to make choices in that work about who we are propping up as the real villains of the story."*

Grantees found intersections with effective policymaking, advocacy, and coordination.

The complexity embedded in narrative and culture change parallels that of coordination and state and local advocacy. Many grantees expressed the vastness and depth of narrative and culture change, including in the actors, collaborators, frameworks, internal capacity, and strategic focus. In reflecting on the last decade of policy advocacy wins (such as the net neutrality fight), grantees expressed concern about how narrative and culture change operate on a local or state level versus the federal level. *The "narrative can get away from you,"* as one grantee noted.

Due to the complexity of scaling narrative and culture change to the federal level, especially in the context of policymaking, grantees expressed the need to *"future-proof"* narrative and culture change work. While this includes the actual narratives, grantees also pointed to bridging divides: ***"One of the reasons I believe the net neutrality fight was so successful and always held up as an example of success is because there was time and money, resources spent on bridging divides that were holding up that fight, and you can track it."*** Future-proofing like this requires careful thought, coordination, and strategic thinking. As some grantees noted, *"those conversations are not happening in the fight against big tech power."*

Coordination efforts within narrative and culture change strategies mirror previous efforts.

Convenings and smaller coalition-like meetings were among the primary modes of collaboration for grantees working on narrative and culture change. For example, one grantee held a large-scale convening in partnership with several foundations where they *"explored narrative in the age of conspiracy and online misinformation"* and named insights into diverse approaches to power building. **More importantly, as the grantee noted, it brought them back to the value of *"having a shared definition."***

Grantees with a more explicit focus on narrative change have also utilized coalition-like councils. As one grantee explained, *"There's the very proactive stuff that we do like actual training, but this is a way for us to keep doing that political education, that consciousness building. We also want to be that role for the rest of the field in a field that might not be as ideologically aligned with us now, but I think we see that work as being a way to kind of shift them towards us and then obviously decision makers around the policies that we work on."*

To strengthen their narrative and culture change capacity, some grantees have undergone internal strategic pivots.

Given available capacity, some grantees launched internal organizational strategies aimed at narrative and culture change. For example, one grantee started a racial equity advisory group *"that is **designed to ultimately make the organization more equitable, not just in communications and narrative but across the board** when it comes to pay equity, when it comes to more diversification, leadership, management, all sorts of things, that working group is there to help."* Another grantee shared that their communication team is explicitly **"shifting its orientation away from being a team that's just implementing the communication needs of our organization and more towards advancing a narrative strategy and a narrative agenda."**

One grantee specified a key component to these shifts: *"Good narrative work **is best when it's embodied across an organization and not just relegated to the communications people on staff.** So, one of the things … our sector can build greater capacity for is just being more effective spokespeople for the work that we do."*

Looking ahead, consider the role and opportunity of distribution networks in elevating aligned narratives.

Reflecting on how to move forward with narrative and culture change strategies, one grantee offered a thoughtful prompt: *"**How are we tapping into distribution networks that give us wider visibility?** There is the long-term challenge of that[,] which distribution networks in the media and tech ecosystem are heavily consolidated and corporate-owned, and part of our strategy process may actually answer what we think we can do there, but in the short term, it's how we tap into networks of distribution for the creative content, not just us but other folks in this field are creating, and how does it get greater visibility."*

This grantee's prompt also suggests a need for increased coordination among field actors about how and where they are aligning around and elevating one another's narratives/content, which tracks with DDP's other goals around increased coordination in the field.

EVALUATOR OBSERVATIONS

Evaluator Observations

In this section, ORS Impact shares our observations on the findings as DDP's external evaluation partner. We offer our perspective, identify common links between sections, and pose questions that the DDP team might reflect on as they continue to implement the new strategy.

It is important to note that the ORS Impact team has brought our own lenses and experiences to bear in this section—both personally and having worked with other organizations engaged in similar endeavors. As evaluators, we are often assumed to be neutral and objective purveyors of information. We do not think objectivity is possible, as everyone interprets information through their own racial and cultural lens, and we do not think neutrality is helpful, particularly when it comes to issues of equity and power.

There is an appetite for more space and sustained opportunities to coordinate, work through differences, and plan proactively.

Across conversations, grantees mentioned that as the field grows, more substantive disagreements are emerging that go beyond debating the details of a particular policy. Yet, they share there are no opportunities or venues to have the principled debate necessary for *"hashing out"* those differences.

Similarly, we heard a desire for sustained spaces to *"build out the offense"* and proactively develop long-term agendas. However, this desire comes into tension with other themes that emerged, including that grantees feel time- and capacity-strapped, are skeptical of funder-driven convenings, and feel frustrated with the number of meetings/scale of the coordination needed.

❓ QUESTIONS FOR DEMOCRACY FUND AND OTHER FUNDERS

- Are there opportunities to co-design spaces or tables with grantees to create these venues? Funder-generated convenings have their potential pitfalls, but grantees did note the positive momentum they can provide.

- Beyond supporting/hosting convenings, how else might you support grantees to *"build out the offense"* or *"future-proof"* their strategies?

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In state and local advocacy efforts, grantees are thinking about both the potential and the challenges of scaling up efforts.

Some grantees working at the national level recognized that successful policy models at the state level can create momentum and put pressure on federal policymakers to implement similar models. As such, strategic advocacy at the state level would be considered a means toward an end. However, grantees also recognized that the primary concern for those working in state houses was the well-being of the people in their jurisdiction. While there were many opportunities for these groups to collaborate and advance common aims, there were also instances where tension arose.

? QUESTIONS FOR DEMOCRACY FUND AND OTHER FUNDERS

- To what extent is the primary goal of your investment in state and local advocacy to build momentum for federal policy work vs. to change the conditions in individual states?
    - How does that balance influence which states you prioritize and the advocacy strategies you support?
    - What implications does that balance have for how you approach federal-level policy that may impact progress made at the state level?

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Scaling up narratives was also top of mind for grantees engaged in that work.

Grantees reminded us of the delicate nature of scaling up (or down) between the state and national levels. Whether it be policy advocacy or narrative and culture change, grantees considered the loss of nuance or *"teeth"* that can happen as *"we oversimplify our messages."*

? QUESTIONS FOR DEMOCRACY FUND AND OTHER FUNDERS

- How might DDP consider the relationship between narrative and culture change work happening at the local or state level with national-level narrative change work?
  - What will it take to ensure that the necessary nuance and complexity is maintained as narratives scale up?

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Is the field setting its own agenda, or is it taking its cues from movement actors?

As some grantees developed deeper relationships with movement actors in spaces like housing justice or abolition, they increasingly saw tech as a lens that could be applied in support of those actors' visions. However, many grantees recognized that the overall field feels emergent in building relationships with movement actors, and may have no intention of doing so. This disposition has implications for narrative work as well. Grantees had strong sentiments about narrative change that is *"for us [and] by us."* In other words, narrative and culture change strategies are inadequate, from creation to distribution, if the lived experiences of the people and community are not reflected.

? QUESTIONS FOR DEMOCRACY FUND AND OTHER FUNDERS

- When thinking about how to build out a broader strategy for the field, does DDP intend to fund technology policy work as a lens that advances movement goals, or as its own discipline that sets its own agenda, aims, and goals? Is it a balance between the two?

- What are the trade-offs between each option?

- What implications, if any, does that have for DDP's ongoing strategy?

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CONCLUSION

IN THIS YEAR'S LEARNING CONVERSATIONS, WE SOUGHT TO UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT STATE OF THE MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY FIELD IN THREE KEY AREAS:

- Coordination among members of the field
- Advocacy at the state and local level
- If and how the field is considering narrative and cultural change strategies

On **coordination**, we heard that the field continued to grow as the intersectionality of technology issues became more apparent. An increase in the number of individuals and organizations engaged was considered a positive development, but added additional layers of complexity.

In **state and local advocacy**, grantees described engaging strategically to advance national priorities, while recognizing that there are resource challenges of doing so.

Regarding **narrative and cultural change** strategies, we heard about the different ways that grantees are promoting positive narratives and centering the experience of Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

In all areas, grantees shared successful models, and identified areas for opportunities. We hope that these findings are helpful for the DDP team as it continues to implement its new strategy.

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APPENDIX: PARTICIPANT LIST

List of Learning Conversation Participants

Claire Atkin, Check My Ads Institute

Anita Banerji, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

David Brody, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Tom Catan, Tech Transparency Project, Campaign for Accountability

Dr. Meredith Clark, Center for Communication, Media Innovation, and Social Change, Northeastern University

Jessica Dheere, Ranking Digital Rights

Dr. Laura Edelson, Cybersecurity for Democracy, Tandon School of Engineering, New York University

Yosef Getachew, Common Cause

Jessica J. González, Free Press

Evan Greer, Fight for the Future

Sabrina Hersi Issa, Bold Impact

Ramah Kudaimi, Action Center on Race and the Economy (ACRE)

Michelle Kuppersmith, Tech Transparency Project, Campaign for Accountability

Chris Lewis, Public Knowledge

Jacquelyn Mason, Media Democracy Fund

Dr. Charlton McIlwain, Center for Critical Race + Digital Studies, New York University

David Morgan, Multicultural Media Correspondents Association (MMCA)

Steven Renderos, MediaJustice

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