

CLEAN SLATE WORKING GROUP ON
EQUITY, JUSTICE, AND DEMOCRACY

Exploratory Principles: Making Progress Together for People and the Planet

MARCH 2023



INTRODUCTION

The Clean Slate for Worker Power project (referred to as “Clean Slate” throughout) was founded in 2018 to address a critical problem in the US economy: that economic inequality, driven by concentrated wealth and diminished collective worker power, has rendered too many people politically powerless and unable to live in safety, security, and dignity.

Since its launch, Clean Slate has brought together dozens of leading labor and worker advocacy voices to strategize around rewriting American labor law in a way that explicitly enables workers to build collective economic and political power.

While Clean Slate has largely focused on specific labor law recommendations, its Working Group on Equity, Justice, and Democracy, launched in 2022, has taken on a broader scope: working with activists, advocates, academics, and labor leaders to consider whether rethinking the power dynamics between markets, government, and people is necessary to achieving greater equity and democracy. As part of this effort, the Working Group calls on colleagues engaged in movement work that may be siloed—workers’ rights vs. racial justice vs. environmental justice vs. democracy—to view our goals as common ones.

The Working Group seeks to encourage intersectionality in the movements for racial, economic, and climate justice because rhetorics around race, class, and the environment are often weaponized to sow divisions, perpetuating the idea that the economy—and therefore human flourishing—is a zero-sum game. The result is a society divided in ways that make it extremely difficult for a critical mass to challenge the workings of capital. Core to this problem is the fact that the nation’s economy was not created with justice in mind. In fact, it was explicitly founded through mechanisms of stratification and subjugation based on race and gender—with stolen Native land and enslaved Africans used as property to further the goals of capital, and women of all races excluded from participation.

The legacy of slavery continues to have lasting impacts on the US workplace and labor market. For example, today’s at-will employment doctrine, which enables most US employers to legally fire employees without warning or explanation, stemmed from employer backlash to growing worker power following Emancipation.¹ The same approach to property rights that gave wealthy white men access to power in the slavery era is evident in our system today: those with assets have power to shape our economy, and those without do not. The fact that Black people in the US

were initially denied ownership over their own lives and then largely denied, to varying extents, the ability to acquire or hold onto property (such as land, enterprise, and housing) from the Emancipation era through today only exacerbates the inequality of a system organized around property rights.²

Our history of racial discrimination is also inextricably linked to environmental injustice. Due to racial segregation policies and industrial practices that have treated Black workers and other workers of color as more disposable than white workers, those who live and work in areas experiencing environmental degradation—such as contaminated water and polluted air and soil—are more likely to be people of color.³ While climate change poses a threat to all of us, communities of color have long dealt with the environmental burdens of economic decisions driven by profit, and these communities will continue to face greater risks as the climate continues to change.

These environmental threats connect back to property rights as well—our government too often is hesitant to curtail business activities driven by owners of major corporations (e.g., those in the fossil fuel industry) despite knowing their activities harm our climate, because our economic system is premised on the idea that the government should intervene as little as possible in the affairs of enterprise. This gives owners of capital, who are primarily white and male, significant power to shape our economy in ways that serve profit over people. Thus, it is impossible to disentangle issues of climate justice from those of racial and economic justice.

Clean Slate and its Working Group view organized labor (broadly defined) as a means of distributing power more equitably. Labor unions have played an important role in addressing the racial wealth gap, for instance, by empowering workers to bargain for higher wages, stronger



benefits, and greater job stability. Unions have also served as mechanisms for people from different backgrounds to organize together toward common goals. Unfortunately, much of the reason we see such radical economic inequality today is because the power of the labor movement has been in decline over the past several decades.

To discuss strategies for rebuilding worker power and challenging taken-for-granted economic and political constructs, particularly the conception of economic rights in the United States, the Clean Slate Working Group on Equity, Justice, and Democracy held three virtual meetings with thirty individuals representing diverse backgrounds, areas of expertise, and points of view. The purpose of these convenings was to foster discussion around principles for a just economy that integrate racial equity, democracy, and climate justice.

To promote transparency and solidarity among the group, the Working Group invited its participants to commit to the following values in their deliberations:

- Racial and indigenous equity is an achievable goal through policy—labor, climate, social, and otherwise.
- Race, indigeneity, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other social identities intersect, and there is not a one-size-fits-all policy that works for everyone.
- All workers have a right to a job that provides a decent standard of living.
- Workers have a right to exercise their voice and assert their rights without retaliation.
- Well-rounded, holistic, and economically secure lives ought not be limited to paid work. Labor and contributions to family and community, the latter often unpaid and less recognized, should be valued as well.
- Policy solutions can benefit all people to live dignified lives where they have a say in their lives and no one is left behind, while preserving the climate and strengthening democracy.
- Markets and economic value are political constructs. Redefining economic value includes human dignity.
- Racial equity, civic engagement, climate, democracy, and labor are not discrete subjects, but are mutually constitutive.

The Working Group carried out its work under the guiding assumption that a focus on the intersection of racial and economic justice ultimately centers those most impacted by economic inequality, namely women and transgender people of color.⁴ This report includes some of the exploratory principles and ideas generated by the Working Group, but does not represent a consensus opinion; individual members of the Working Group may not agree with specific parts of this report. Clean Slate, as a project, offers this report as a means of advancing discussions on these important topics.

With this paper, we call on our colleagues across movements to join our exploration of the following three principles we developed through our conversations:

EXPLORATORY PRINCIPLE 1: True democracy requires inclusive political power and greater civic engagement.

EXPLORATORY PRINCIPLE 2: We should all be guaranteed a bundle of economic rights that follow us regardless of where we work or live. We cannot rely solely on markets to ensure economic opportunity, inclusion, and security.

EXPLORATORY PRINCIPLE 3: We need a market-shaping approach to government that employs strategies that integrate racial, economic, and climate justice wherever possible.

At the beginning of each section, we lay out some of the ideas that animated our exploration and that our participants used to frame our discussions. At the end of each section, we offer concrete steps to broaden and connect this exploration across all of our work together. Most importantly, we ask that our Working Group members, as well as all the great activists, advocates, academics, and labor leaders they come in contact with, bring the spirit of collaboration to their efforts to create a more equitable economy, democracy, and society. We hope that you will always think of Clean Slate as a home for testing, challenging, and exploring these ideas.

EXPLORATORY PRINCIPLE #1: TRUE DEMOCRACY REQUIRES INCLUSIVE POLITICAL POWER AND GREATER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

True democracy is premised on the notion that civic engagement is a human right and that all participants in our economic and political systems should have decision-making power. Put another way, all workers and people must have a voice in defining our economy, and all inhabitants of our country must have a voice in our laws, structures, and politics. However, this entails more than the right to vote or earn a living. Much of the discussion around the democratic process focuses on the electoral sphere, and while there remains much progress to be made in increasing democracy in our electoral systems, we also need to consider where we could enable democratic participation elsewhere in society, such as in the design of the economic sphere.

In most cases, workers are not empowered to participate in much of the economic decision-making that influences their lives. Much of our economy is structured as if only those who own capital should have a say in making decisions. Not only does this often result in outcomes that benefit shareholders at the expense of people and the planet, but it is also inherently undemocratic.

We explored the idea that people, not just those who own financial assets, should have power that enables them to participate in directing our economy. For workers, this might involve having greater influence over decisions around wages, hours, working conditions, benefits, CEO compensation, the character and culture of the corporations for which they work, and what their work is accomplishing.

This idea has important implications for basic laws governing the workplace. We discussed whether true worker power is possible only if we do away with at-will employment. The fact that in most cases, employers can terminate an employee's job for almost any reason—or for no reason at all—means that employees do not have the security to advocate for themselves at work.

We questioned how robust a democracy we can claim to have given the vulnerability of individuals whose livelihoods are becoming increasingly subject to the discretion of others. Some in the Working Group posited that eliminating at-will employment through the institution of just-cause laws—and going a step further by introducing a federal jobs guarantee—is necessary for ensuring that workers are empowered to participate fully in steering the direction of the workplace and the economy.

We had broad consensus within the Working Group that for more workers to have a say in what happens in the workplace, more workers will need to be unionized. Moreover, we recognized that the importance of workers' ability to organize goes beyond impact at the workplace level—collective action is critical to advancing economic, racial, environmental, and social justice movements. But current labor law makes it difficult for workers to organize around issues not directly tied to the workplace (i.e., issues beyond wages, hours, and working conditions) or to influence how a corporation deals with such issues even if workers are unionized. Certain demands related to accessing health care, childcare, and other types of care, for example, are not protected by labor law and in some cases are prohibited. And broader issues, like the environmental impact of a company's or employee's work, similarly fall outside the realm that labor law protects—or even contemplates—as topics for organizing or bargaining. As a result, even though unions may be one of the only sources of power for many workers, we recognized that this power is severely limited to a particular set of issues. We discussed how labor law could be amended to allow for workers to organize across a broader spectrum of concerns.

The Working Group discussed whether increasing the quantity and quality of collective bargaining in the US would require the implementation of sectoral bargaining, a form of collective bargaining through which workers can organize across entire occupations, industries, or regions and not be limited only to their respective workplaces. Sectoral bargaining expands coverage to more workers, encourages more equal pay across different worker groups, and brings people together under common goals. The right to participate in such broad-based bargaining is presupposed in most other democratic nations, but has been denied to the vast majority of American workers under current labor law.⁵ There have been promising developments in this realm, however: for example, in 2022, a multi-racial coalition of fast food workers across California organized to pass the Fast Food Accountability and Standards Recovery Act, which would form a Fast Food Council to regulate sectoral wages and labor conditions for California fast food workers, the majority of whom are women and people of color.⁶ While the legislation is currently on hold—restaurant owners have filed a lawsuit and sponsored a referendum—the act has inspired the proposal of similar sectoral policies in other states.⁷

We questioned how robust a democracy we can claim to have given the vulnerability of individuals whose livelihoods are becoming increasingly subject to the discretion of others.

We also discussed the widely held belief within the Working Group that building greater democracy in the workplace can lead to a more democratic society more broadly: normalizing collective organizing to improve not only working conditions but also the impact that corporations have on the broader world will encourage us to see how many societal issues intersect. But, to truly advance democracy in our economy, some in the Working Group encouraged us to think beyond the workplace and consider mechanisms for empowering everyone, not just workers, with stakes in corporate decision-making. For example, if a corporation is considering an action that will affect the environment where people live, how can those residents have a say in that decision-making process, even if they are not employed by the corporation and/or are not property owners? This calls for a broader definition of economic rights, one that is detached from individual economic self-interest and property rights.

Working group members agreed that there is much to be learned about leading broad-based change from the labor movement, and collective bargaining is an example of a decision-making process that can be applied in other contexts. Common good bargaining is one such approach to power-building that goes beyond the workplace. The Bargaining for the Common Good Network is a collective of unions, community groups, and racial justice organizations that use union bargaining as a tool for demanding broader structural changes related to racial justice, education, immigration, climate justice, housing, and so on.⁸ Some common good organizing principles include expanding the scope of union bargaining beyond wages and benefits, engaging community allies as partners in developing organizing strategies, centering racial justice in union demands, conducting power analyses to reveal the actors with the most power to make change, and refusing to end organizing campaigns when a union settles its contract. Specific common good bargaining demands might include: paid time to attend racial equity and diversity trainings; partnerships with local educational institutions to create apprenticeship and job training opportunities that enable more people to join the workforce; the banning of militarized police at worker and student protests; the use of climate-friendly materials in the workplace; additional time-off and reimbursement for employees who use climate-friendly modes of transport to get to work; and the greening of workplace infrastructure.

Community benefits agreements are another mechanism for balancing power between corporate and community interests. These agreements serve as legally enforceable contracts in which a corporation—typically a real estate developer—agrees to contribute collectively determined benefits to a community in exchange for the public’s support around a particular initiative or project.⁹ The types of benefits included in these agreements may include affordable housing, equitable hiring practices, environmentally-friendly building practices, green space, and so on. While such agreements do not inherently guarantee transformative outcomes, they are an existing legal mechanism for community demands that could be used more frequently. The Working Group also discussed the possibility that community benefits agreements could be used in other industries beyond real estate.

Another model for enhancing community power-building that came up in our Working Group discussions was Urban Habitat's Boards & Commissions Leadership Institute, which trains social justice leaders, particularly leaders of color, and helps them get onto local and regional boards and commissions.¹⁰ These commissioners are trained to bring a critical intersectional perspective centering race and class to policymaking, and to integrate community participation and perspectives – particularly from those who have been historically marginalized – into the process. Some of the local policy wins achieved in various cities through this model include free transit passes for youth, better jobs training opportunities, wage increases, the addition of healthier food stores and community gardens, protections for tenants’ rights, and better zoning for affordable housing. Urban Institute is working to replicate this model with additional partners across the country.

But the Working Group also noted that we should seek ways to establish new, cross-sectoral, cross-class bodies. In their book *Civic Power*, K. Sabeel Rahman and Hollie Russon Gilman argue that for power imbalances to truly shift, state institutions must provide more and better forms of democratic policymaking.¹¹ They suggest a model of participatory budgeting developed by the Workers Party in Brazil as a process with a lot of potential for empowerment because it allows people to make binding—not just advisory—recommendations for how to spend public money. Participatory budgeting is a deliberative process, so it is much more labor- and time-intensive than other forms of community engagement, but it has shown real results in shifting power to communities: in Brazil, the process has had the redistributive effect of moving more funding and resources to lower-income neighborhoods. Participatory budgeting has been implemented across a number of US cities as well, although in many instances the US equivalents lack the participation levels necessary to meaningfully shift power to the most marginalized communities. However, there is an opportunity for organizers and policymakers to institutionalize this process in ways that

encourage broader participation so that more people have a say in how their municipal funds are spent. This deliberative, participatory approach could be applied to other policymaking processes as well.

The Working Group acknowledged that steering economic decision-making to fully representative bodies that reflect demographic, economic, and political diversity would, of course, not be easy – dominant political groups do not readily relinquish the property rights of their identity. People would need to trust that it is worth their time to become more involved in decision-making processes, and we would need policies that make full participation both accessible and supportive. Guardrails would need to be in place to ensure that decision-making mechanisms that are democratic in theory do not inadvertently benefit only those who already have the time and resources to participate. We would also need to challenge the pernicious myth that democratic processes and collective decision-making are inefficient, or better yet, that efficiency should always be the priority.

Action Items for Continued Exploration:

- Actively support labor law reform – including repeal of right-to-work law – as the means to expand power in economic and political spheres, whether your work focuses on racial justice, democracy, or the climate crisis. Only with this expanded economic and political power will we achieve any of our goals.
- Expand your definition of relevant stakeholders. The economy isn't relevant only for workers; racial justice isn't relevant only for people of color; democracy isn't relevant only for political organizers; and the climate crisis isn't relevant only for environmentalists. In addition, consider how the labor movement can be more relevant for people who are not union members. Bring the community to all spheres.
- Demand the time that democratic decision-making takes. Efficiency isn't the only or even highest value in our society.
- Explore new mechanisms for democratic participation in economic spheres, such as participatory budgeting and modernized avenues for public input in regulatory processes.

EXPLORATORY PRINCIPLE #2: WE SHOULD ALL BE GUARANTEED A BUNDLE OF ECONOMIC RIGHTS THAT FOLLOW US REGARDLESS OF WHERE WE WORK OR LIVE. WE CANNOT RELY SOLELY ON MARKETS TO ENSURE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, INCLUSION, AND SECURITY.

For most people in the United States, access to benefits is conditional based on employment. People are either expected to rely on their employer for care and income (and, by extension, housing, food, and other basic needs), or to accept meager and often temporary public assistance while looking for a job. This is not the only way of structuring society or a safety net—it is a historical relic of a system that grew out of a time period when most people stayed at their jobs for decades. As a consequence, a job is always more than just a job—it’s a requirement for a decent life, for access to all crucial goods.

The Working Group explored how this reliance on employment is disempowering for employees, whose power to fully participate in workplace democracy is curtailed by the need to remain employed. We also discussed how it can disempower people in general because it signals that one is only deserving of basic rights if they have a job. We discussed whether the fact that one can only participate in the political economy through employment means that both employed and unemployed people are, in effect, structurally dominated: the former must hold onto any job to retain economic citizenship while the latter has no economic citizenship at all. Moreover, Working Group members noted that people who work as “independent contractors” under employment law may work full time and still lack economic citizenship.

We also considered the fact that people can lose access to benefits even while employed—striking workers can have their pay or benefits docked, and those who rely on public benefits can lose access to essential programs like SNAP while striking. We considered whether we can have economic justice in a society where workers advocating for improved quality of life can face starvation as a result.

The Working Group explored whether economic justice needs to expand beyond the workplace as the site of empowerment to provide basic economic rights to everyone. Some Working Group members offered that only by expanding the concept of basic economic rights will people be able to flourish and participate fully in democratic processes, freed from the fear or threat of losing their job and, as a result, access to what they and future generations need to thrive. This definition of empowerment means more than control over financial assets—it means greater control over our health, safety, and capability as factors in influencing our wellbeing.

The Working Group discussed whether these insights would mean we cannot rely only or perhaps even primarily on markets to allocate goods, services, and opportunities. For generations, we have looked to markets to allocate resources like housing, health care, and education, which has led to commodification and financialization instead of provision based on need. We explored whether the government should instead be the central provider of a guaranteed, universal bundle of rights that enable everyone to have agency and autonomy in their lives. We questioned whether a more assertive set of public guarantees around meeting people’s basic needs would also restore faith in government institutions as stewards of our society.

We discussed the following as public goods, some or all of which should be considered to be made available to everyone, regardless of their income or family structure:

- Health care
- Childcare, elder care, and other forms of care
- Basic income
- Housing
- Employment
- Education
- Time to rest
- Healthy food
- Debt relief
- Reproductive autonomy
- Healthy environments

We explored whether making these benefits universally provided would build unity across communities. Members of the Working Group discussed how recasting benefits as universal resources, rather than minimal provisions only available once someone falls into a certain definition of poverty, could support a vision of public goods as promoting empowerment, capability, dignity, agency, and prosperity for all. We also discussed how the courts can best protect these economic rights in a way that equates to the courts’ protection of property rights and

what effect that would have. We hypothesized that such equality of protection would shift the power dynamics involved in environmental stewardship because people's right to a healthy environment would be equal to a corporation's right to do business as they please.

Many in the Working Group expressed the hope that if people's basic needs were taken care of, there would be less division across racial and socioeconomic lines, and it would be easier to recognize that our problems and solutions are intertwined—and also that people would have more time, energy, and capacity to participate in democratic processes and collective problem solving.

Several Working Group members raised the point that these benefits are already considered public goods throughout much of the world—from the National Health Service in the United Kingdom, to largely free higher education in Germany, to highly subsidized child care in Denmark, to a right to housing in France and South Africa, it is important to recognize that demands that may seem radical in the United States are presupposed rights in virtually every other democratic society.

Action Items for Continued Exploration:

- Develop common language for exploring the value of expanding the bundle of public goods. In each of our movements we often use different rhetoric to argue for connected ideas. Our common goals will be more powerful if they echo linguistically across movements.
- Consider the risk of commodification when assessing policy options. Often two policy options may seem to be of equal value when the metric for assessment is monetary value. For example, a tax subsidy to cover childcare costs may score the same as an entitlement to childcare access, but these options are not equal in terms of establishing childcare as a public good and moving away from market-based allocation.
- Continue to participate in the debate over the future of the U.S. Constitution, including whether there should be a guarantee of certain economic rights under the Constitution and the law.

EXPLORATORY PRINCIPLE 3: WE NEED A MARKET-SHAPING APPROACH TO GOVERNMENT THAT EMPLOYS STRATEGIES THAT INTEGRATE RACIAL, ECONOMIC, AND CLIMATE JUSTICE.

These days, it is in vogue to talk about “industrial policy” as a result of the passage of laws like the Inflation Reduction Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. For the purposes of this report, we define industrial policy broadly as any effort by the government to divert resources or influence certain sectors of the economy over others. Corporations currently have an outsize influence on industrial policy, which has consequences for racial, economic, and climate justice. The fact that the US approach to economic development and environmental conservation has been to rely on markets for solutions has meant that corporations not only drive the strategies but also that strategies are primarily for private benefit. Some in the Working Group posited that private enterprise—in acting on the profit motive—will never prioritize producing the goods and services that people truly need over those that people with the most disposable income want. Moreover, some argued that race itself may be weaponized as a strategic political tool to accrue private benefit borne out from government action.

Working Group members noted that it is important to remember that “the market” is not an amorphous, natural entity devoid of politics—people created the market and should continue to define its rules. In fact, many in the Working Group agreed that the notion of a “free market” is a strawman, that instead we have a market shaped by policies that have their roots in the political preferences of corporate market participants. Thus, the Working Group explored how we can have hands-on, economic-shaping policies that center people and the way we live.

We explored whether part of the way corporations have maintained their power is by propagating the assumption that economic prosperity and environmental stewardship are always in conflict, an idea that sows unnecessary division that harms people and favors corporations. While we acknowledged that there can be trade-offs between industrial and climate policy, and that policies that are better for our climate may phase out particular industries and lead to short-term job losses, we also discussed how policies can facilitate opportunities for workers to develop new skills

and access new pathways to employment in climate-friendly industries. In fact, some in the Working Group noted that that has been an important focus of the Biden Administration's push with the Inflation Reduction Act, and that helping to make that successful would be key for both the climate and labor movements over the coming years.

The Working Group explored how coordinated strategies like tax incentives, research grants, and other public resources can shape markets to encourage more equitable economic outcomes while making progress in combating the climate crisis. For example, we discussed how an integrated public policy approach, one that focuses on, for example, wages and housing and health care and environmental protection, could have benefits that protect the environment and cut across racial and economic lines. We discussed that this kind of integrated approach requires balancing objectives, not relying on profit-maximizing motivation as the sole or even primary point of industrial policy. The Working Group members did not advocate eliminating markets or profit-seeking as a legitimate object. Instead, we discussed the merits of adopting a more expansive definition of the objectives driving industrial policy. While, as discussed above, some acknowledged that certain approaches could reduce profits for some companies or even sectors, many expressed the belief that (1) robust profits would still be possible to sustain economic growth and (2), more importantly, national and even global well-being would be enhanced by the resulting increase in social and ecological stability.

We acknowledged that this kind of coordination isn't easy or simple, but that taking the time to adopt these kinds of strategies can both address root causes of problems and have the greatest intersectional impact. In the policymaking process, the issues that are most valued are what gets measured. We discussed that if we insist on the evaluation of intersectional impacts, we could signal the high value of this lens and make it more likely that industrial policy will lead to racial, economic, and climate justice.

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Action Items for Continued Exploration:

- Identify and acknowledge trade-offs early to allow time to develop alternatives. For example, if a new industrial policy will result in job loss, assessing this impact early in the policymaking process allows time to create complementary policies to support job training and/or guaranteed income, which can change both the perception and reality of conflict. Some find Heather McGhee's concept of the solidarity dividend a useful frame for rethinking the zero-sum assumption in our economy: the gains made when people come together across divisions outweigh any gains that can be won in silos.¹²
- Demystify power relations and political dynamics within certain industries to reveal which industry actors have the greatest intersectional impact. This can help target policy efforts more efficiently and directly.
- Evaluate policies using a distributional analysis rather than an aggregate one to help actors understand the ways policies will impact communities differently. The results of such analyses also help highlight root causes of particular racial, economic, and climate issues, making it more likely that new policies can address them. For example, policies aimed at making manufactured housing more energy efficient will not have an intersectional benefit unless it can include a way to make these environmentally friendly homes affordable enough for lower-income families to purchase. Having an understanding of which groups will be most impacted by a particular decision also makes it possible to center movement leadership from those groups in the policymaking process, which makes it even more likely that the policy can address root causes.
- Bring into discussions of cost-benefit analyses the “cost of doing nothing.” This additional calculation can challenge policymakers' typical aversions to taking action by directly acknowledging the harms caused by the status quo. For example, a complicated housing policy aimed at providing affordable, energy-efficient homes for more families of color might be a strain on a city budget, but pointing out the cost of not providing housing for the families

- who need it may demonstrate that the cost of doing nothing is even greater.
- Consider advocating that corporations be required to conduct citizen participation analyses that demonstrate engagement with those most impacted by a corporate decision, in line with current practices around environmental impact analyses. Citizen participation is already required in some local, state, and federal policies regarding real estate development, and this standard could be applied more broadly to other industries. Such analyses can lead to community benefits agreements that spell out the benefits that communities will receive through the enactment of a particular corporate decision.
 - Consider proposing specific, long-term targets for each new policy agenda—such as the White House’s Justice40 Pledge. Explicit targets can drive generative, cross-cutting thinking around strategies to achieve those targets. Long-term targets make it more likely that strategies are focused on broader outcomes rather than merely short-term policy implementation. At the same time, including some short-term targets can help build momentum and create the perception that the ultimate goals are both realistic and achievable.
 - Develop metrics for racial and equity impact and advocate for collecting these metrics – “we value what we measure and we measure what we value.”



- Use grassroots power-building approaches to designing policies—e.g., define problems by centering the lived experience of those most affected by a particular issue and then gradually bring in seemingly disparate groups who are affected by the same issue in other ways. Bringing in grassroots actors can build cross-cutting momentum and support for solutions to intersectional problems.
- Generate greater participation in local policymaking to build momentum nationally. Local initiatives are often easier for people to get involved with and may lead to results more quickly, which can encourage participants to stick with organizing for broader wins. For example, organizers involved in the reparations process in Evanston, Illinois reported seeing greater momentum in the national reparations conversation after their policy was passed locally.
- Include an educational component in policy initiatives. Having credible messengers inform people about key issues, and particularly the ways in which they are intersectional, can boost participation.
- Take a cohort approach to policy initiatives to unite groups around key intersectional issues. Forming select groups of organizational leaders for a distinct period of time with the goal of connecting with one another to understand others' priorities and theories of change can generate greater collective impact.

CONCLUSION

The Clean Slate Working Group on Equity, Justice, and Democracy intends for the three exploratory principles we developed through our convenings to serve as invitations—or provocations—to view the movements for racial, economic, and climate justice as deeply intertwined. There can be no justice in any realm without a more equal distribution of decision-making power, and all people are more empowered when they can live with dignity, agency, and security, regardless of employment status. History has shown us that we cannot rely on markets to create opportunities for human flourishing, so we call on movements leaders, organizers, and policymakers to push for market-shaping policies that integrate cross-cutting goals and strategies aimed at collective empowerment.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Rebecca Dixon, “Reversing Labor Laws Rooted in Slavery,” National Employment Law Project, June 17, 2022, <https://www.nelp.org/blog/reversing-labor-laws-rooted-in-slavery/>.
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NOTES

About Clean Slate for Worker Power

Clean Slate for Worker Power is a project of Harvard Law School's Center for Labor and a Just Economy. The project developed from a foundational question to address the dual crises of economic and political inequality in America: what would labor law look like if, starting from a clean slate, it was designed to empower working people to build a truly equitable democracy and economy? Based on a reimagined vision of labor law that works for all, the Clean Slate project focuses on advancing pragmatic and innovative policy solutions to enable working people to build countervailing power for a more inclusive and equitable nation.

About the Center for Labor and a Just Economy at Harvard Law School

The Center for Labor and a Just Economy is Harvard University's hub of creative research, policy, and strategies focusing on empowering working people to build an equitable economy and resilient democracy. Through convening stakeholders, disseminating ideas, advising policy makers, and shaping how the media understands progressive labor issues, the Center is committed to reimagining the law and developing paradigm-shifting policy.