

re:power 2022 Organizer Survey Results

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Research Questions

- What are the short and long-term needs of organizers, particularly BIPOC organizers, that the progressive movement needs to address?
- In what ways do these needs differ based on the characteristics of organizers and communities in which they are organizing?

Data Collection

- Survey responses were collected using an Alchemer online survey from March 18, 2022 - May 5, 2022.
- re:power shared the survey link directly with training alumni, staff contacts, board member contacts, and on social media. Additionally, re:power partnered with at least 15 organizations who also shared the survey with their contacts. Unique organization-specific links were used to track the source of incoming responses.
- The links that generated the highest numbers of responses were: re:power (n = 115), Netroots Nation (n = 83), re:power staff (n = 50), Analyst Institute (n = 22), Progressive Multiplier (n = 14), and MoveOn (n = 13).

Survey Respondents

- In order for a survey to be considered complete, all questions through the short-term and long-term needs section needed to be answered. There were **349 complete surveys** submitted by unique respondents.
- Although the primary purpose of this survey was to collect responses from BIPOC organizers, the majority of respondents are white (60%), which is a limitation of this analysis.
- Future iterations of this survey may benefit from a longer data collection period, including additional time to plan dissemination with partner organizations who can reach a larger audience of BIPOC organizers.

Groups of Survey Respondents

- Due to the limited number of survey respondents from some specific groups, we are not always able to subset responses based on specific demographic or organizational characteristics.
 - For example, we highlight findings specific to BIPOC women (n = 116) and Black respondents (n = 70) in this summary, but not Asian/Asian American respondents (n = 36) or Latinx respondents (n = 39).
 - Conclusions drawn from a very small sample of respondents could be misleading if those respondents are not a representative sample of organizers sharing any specific characteristic.

Key Findings



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Short-term challenges

- Overall, the issue respondents are most concerned about in the short-term (i.e., the next 18 months) is **organizer burnout**. This was consistent across all types of organizing.
- However, among BIPOC women, while **organizer burnout** remains a top area of concern, a similar number of respondents cited the **disconnect between power building and bettering people's lived experiences** as top concerns.
- Among Black respondents, the **disconnect between power building and bettering people's lived experiences** was much more frequently cited as a concern than organizer burnout.

Long-term challenges

- The top long-term challenges (i.e., over the next five years) identified by BIPOC women are **entrenched powers external to organization preventing change** and **organizer burnout**. These were closely followed by **lack of funding** and **organizational sustainability**. Among Black respondents, **lack of funding** and **organizational sustainability** were the top two long-term challenges cited.
- Overall, respondents most often cited **entrenched powers external to organization preventing change** as a long-term challenge, followed closely by **organizer burnout**. These were the top two challenges (with varying order) across all types of organizing.

Short-term and long-term needs

- Respondents most often cited **more funding for their organizations' work, more or better collaboration with other organizations,** and **more support to address or prevent burnout** as short-term needs.
- For Black organizers and BIPOC women, **training opportunities on topics relating to both current and new responsibilities** superseded improved collaboration as a short-term need.
- Disabled organizers were about 1.5 times as likely as non-disabled organizers to list **more support to address or prevent burnout** as a short-term need.
- These findings are consistent with findings relating to organizers' long-term needs.

Organizer burnout

Respondent suggestions relating to addressing organizer burnout centered on the following themes:

- Value and support organizers
- Devote resources to preventing burnout
- Use sustainable funding to support better work environments
- Support organizing staff with holistic and realistic approaches
 - This theme was the most prevalent across all responses

Addressing organizer burnout

Select responses on supporting organizing staff with holistic and realistic approaches

“Employers [need to] care about not harming their organizers and build in care considerations and an acknowledgement that sometimes things don't get done on schedule if the conditions changed, new needs were revealed, people needed more time to learn something, etc. Reality.”

“Pay organizers and ensure nonprofits are not exploiting their workers. Educate organizers on what are signs of burnout, unrealistic expectations from employers [...], and ways to [disrupt] destructive methods of organizing that cause burnout.”

“Recognition of successes and treating organizers as people outside of their jobs. Allowing people to mourn losses without being forced to move on quickly.”

“Forming a union where folks can negotiate job benefits, vacation time and have more of a say in their work life. In addition, more opportunities for connection with other organizers doing similar work, leadership development and skill building for staff, particularly folks of color, immigrant, refugee, women, LGBTQ+, disabled and other under-represented groups.”

Training topics

- Overall, when respondents were asked to select all the training topics that would benefit them or their organization, they expressed the most interest in trainings on **Building Organizing Relationships, Power Mapping**, and **Finding Our People and Building Community**. However, these choices were only slightly more popular than the next most frequently selected topics; respondents have a wide range of training interests.
- When asked to prioritize **up to three training topics that interested them most**, the options listed above remained very popular, but the most frequently selected training was the **Women of Color Leadership Cohort**.
- Among legislative organizers, **Strategic Planning For Legislative Action** was another frequently selected priority training topic.

Training format and support

- Nearly half of respondents are most interested in a **cohort-based training format** that includes staff from their organizations and peer organizations.
 - The aligns with comments from several organizers about a need for more community-building within the progressive community, “both for knowledge sharing and general camaraderie.”
- More than one third of respondents said their organizations **would benefit “a lot” from each of the following supports:**
 - More training content tailored to their organization’s needs
 - More money to cover training costs
 - More support integrating new skills into their organization’s work after attending trainings

Data tools

- Respondents use a variety of tools to manage data. **Google Sheets, VAN/EveryAction, and Excel** are the most commonly used tools among respondents overall and across all types of organizing.
- Most respondents' organizations have at least some data needs that are not met with existing tools.
- The majority of respondents whose organizations access voter file data use **NGPSmartVAN**, though many respondents' organizations do not use voter file data.

Data practices and needs

Respondents reported needing the most data-related support around **conducting their own research, improving data collection practices, and improving systems for storing data.**

“Mostly my current job has no way to store the data over the long term. We don’t have a volunteer database, and only use our CRM to track fundraising and light touch activism like petition signatures and source codes.”

“We are at the point of our data & organizing where we can do more, but sometimes it’s hard to figure what that more is--research, but to what purpose?”

“I wish we had more accurate data that was obtained on a relational way. I wish we had more technology and training in various programs that could help accurately reflect what we are trying trying obtain.”

“We have no real way to measure the impact of our work since we work in partnership with many other organizations and with campaigns. We can only measure output, not impact.”

Data on marginalized populations

Among respondents whose organizations experienced challenges obtaining or using voter data, respondents most often cited **data on marginalized populations being inaccurate** as a challenge. Specific needs include:

- “Data on religious affiliations in communities and overall better data on race and ethnicity breakdowns.”
- “Information on marginalized communities including Native American and recently incarcerated, for example, who need direct health outreach.”
- “Data that is more granular than just race (ethnic communities in Latinx communities, AAPI communities, more granular data on Black communities).”
- “Data on the invisible citizens who do not vote; better data on Spanish Speakers.”
- “[Accurate] data on rural communities.”

Short-term funding challenges

- Respondents anticipate a number of funding-related challenges in the next 18 months:
 - Half of respondents are concerned about **getting enough funding to expand current programs and staffing to desired levels.**
 - Approximately one third of respondents shared each of the other potential concerns listed on the survey: not getting enough funding to maintain current programs and staffing, getting funding too late in the electoral cycle, getting funding that won't continue beyond the electoral cycle, funder goals not aligning with organizational goals, and demonstrating to potential funders that programs are effective.

Long-term funding challenges

Long-term, organizers described concerns relating to **obtaining and maintaining sustainable funding**, including:

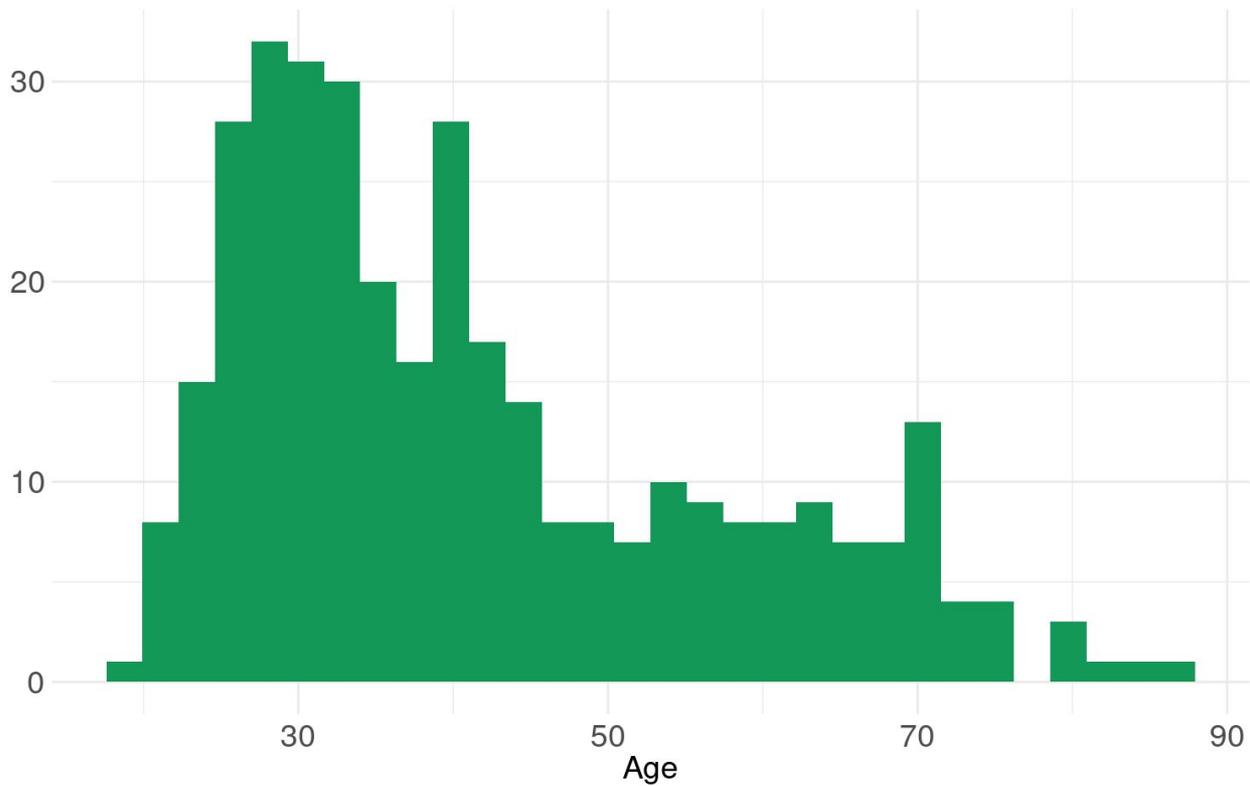
- Competition for sustainable funding that is aligned with org priorities
- Threat of donor fatigue/loss of interest
- Getting funding for ongoing work (persuasion, power building, etc.)
- Lack of support for longer-term organizing strategies

“We need sustained investments by individual foundations -- more money over a longer period of time. Conservative foundations have invested in an infrastructure [...] Progressive funders need to adopt similar strategies if we are to gain the traction we need to build a stronger base.”

Respondent Demographic Characteristics

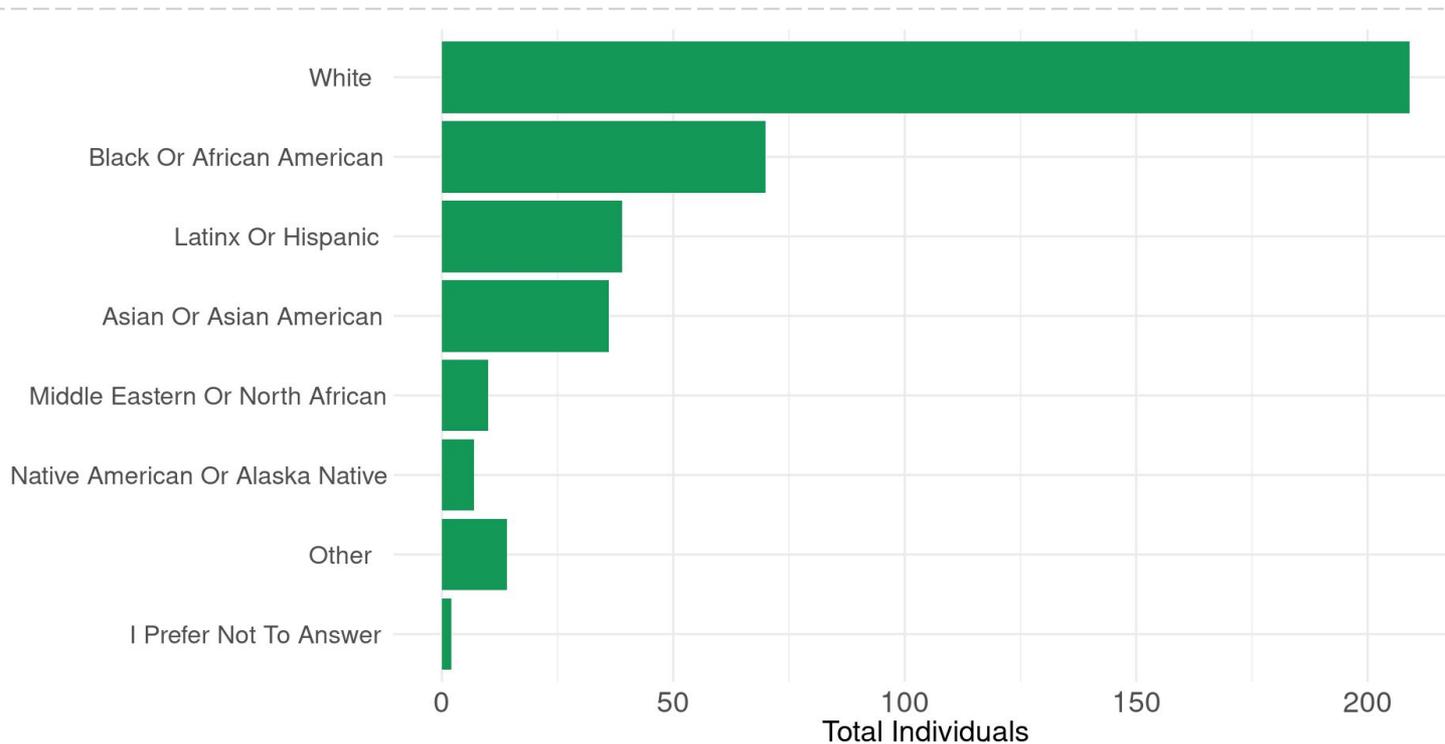


While respondents represent a wide range of ages (19-87), the majority of respondents are at the younger end of this range. The mean age of respondents is 41 and the median age is 38.



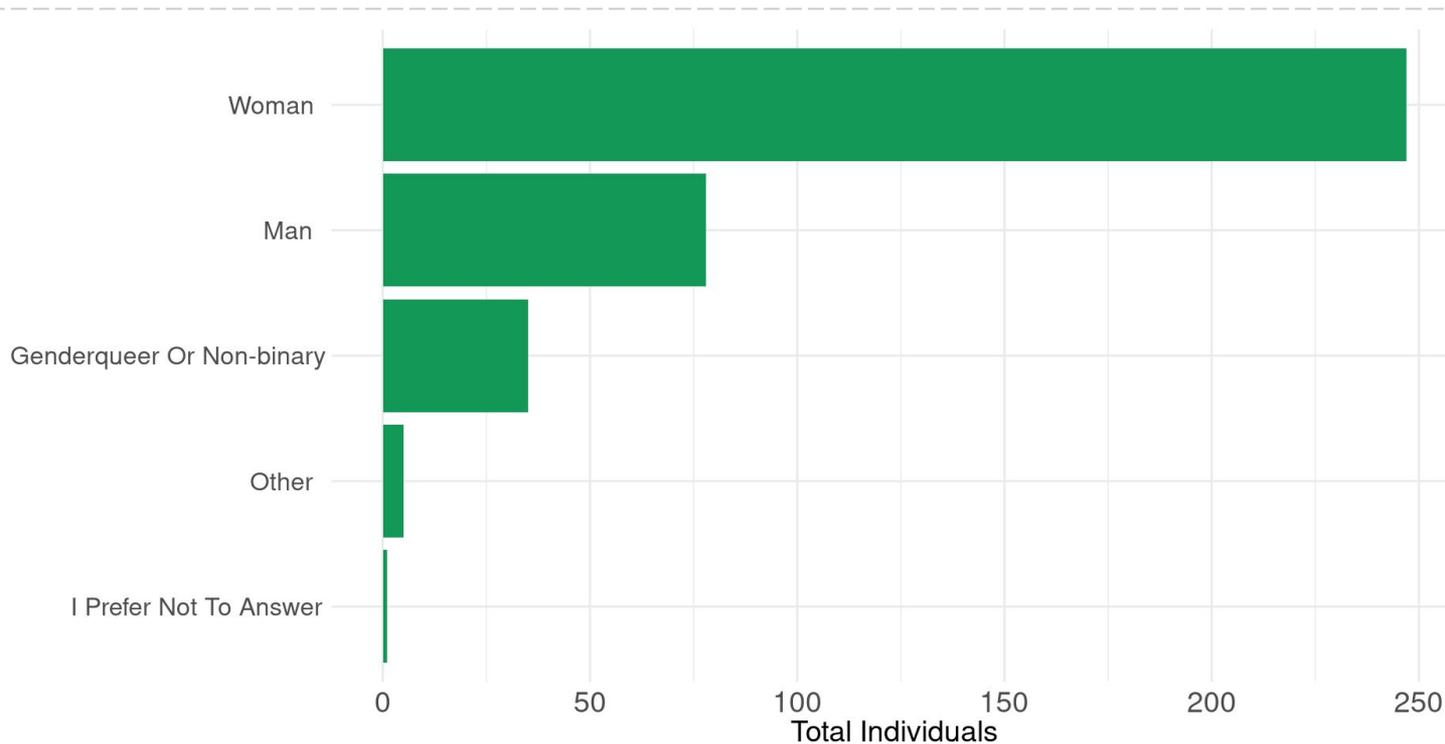
What is your age?

The survey aimed to collect as many responses as possible from BIPOC organizers. One in five respondents (20%) self-identify as Black or African American. Latinx or Hispanic (11%) and Asian or Asian American (10%) respondents also comprise substantial percentages of the universe.



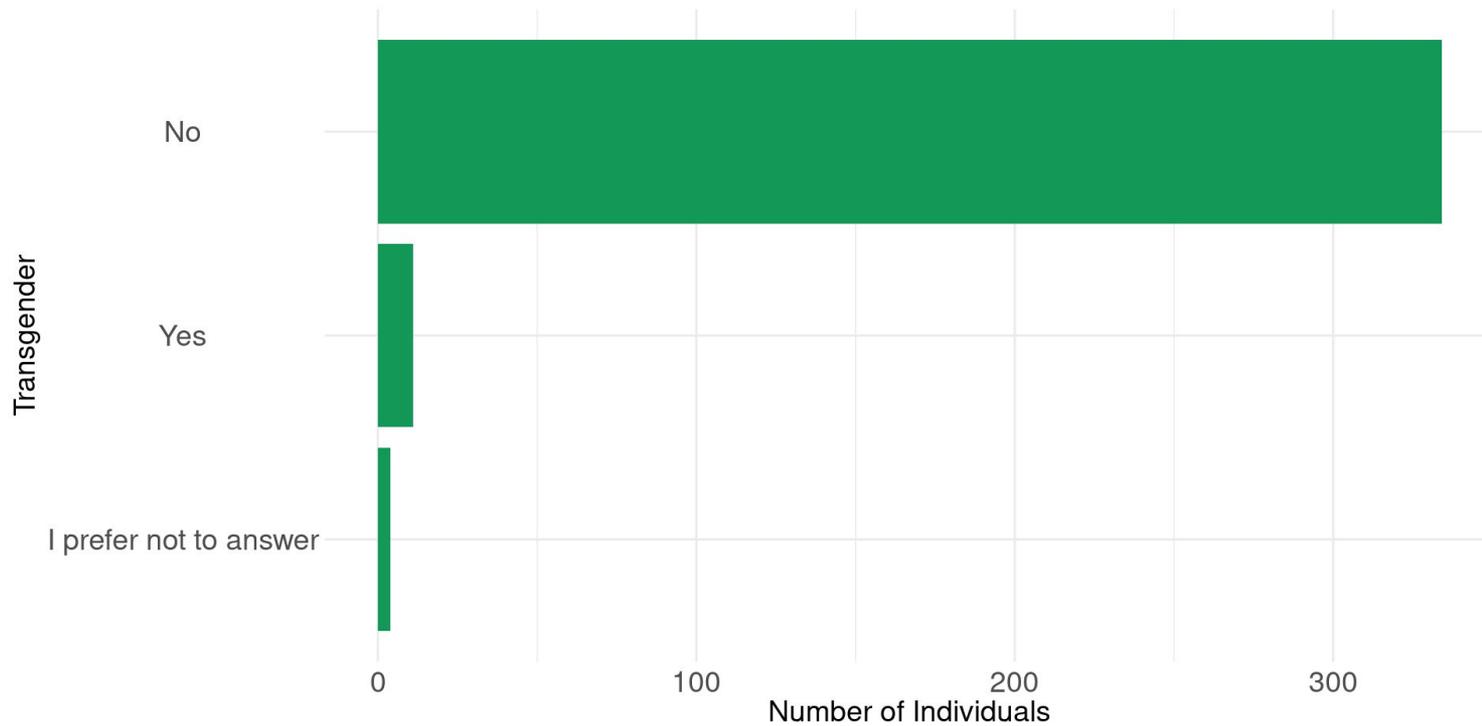
Select any and all of the following racial/ethnic categories that you feel describe you:

More than two thirds of respondents (71%) self-identify as women.



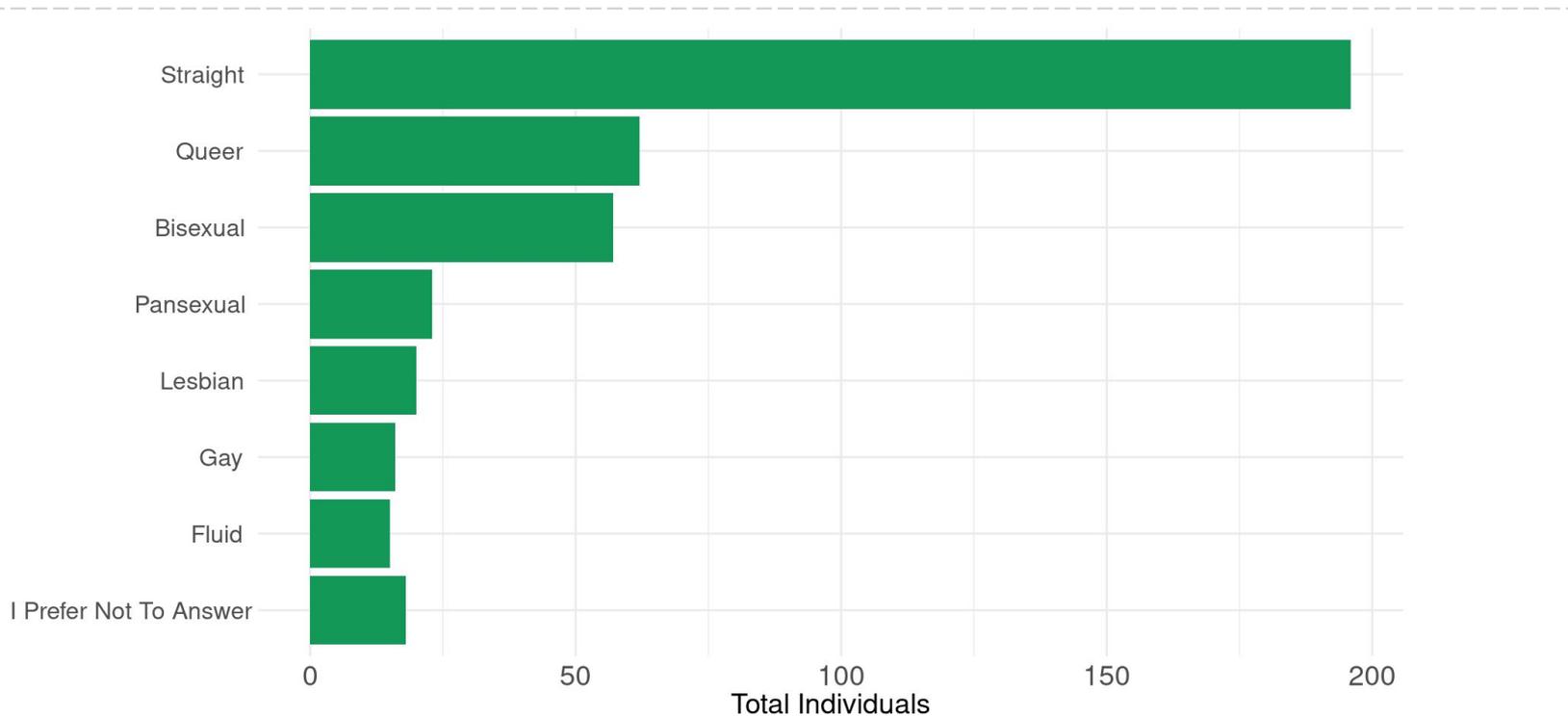
Select any and all of the following gender identities that you feel describe you:

Eleven respondents (3%) self-identify as transgender.



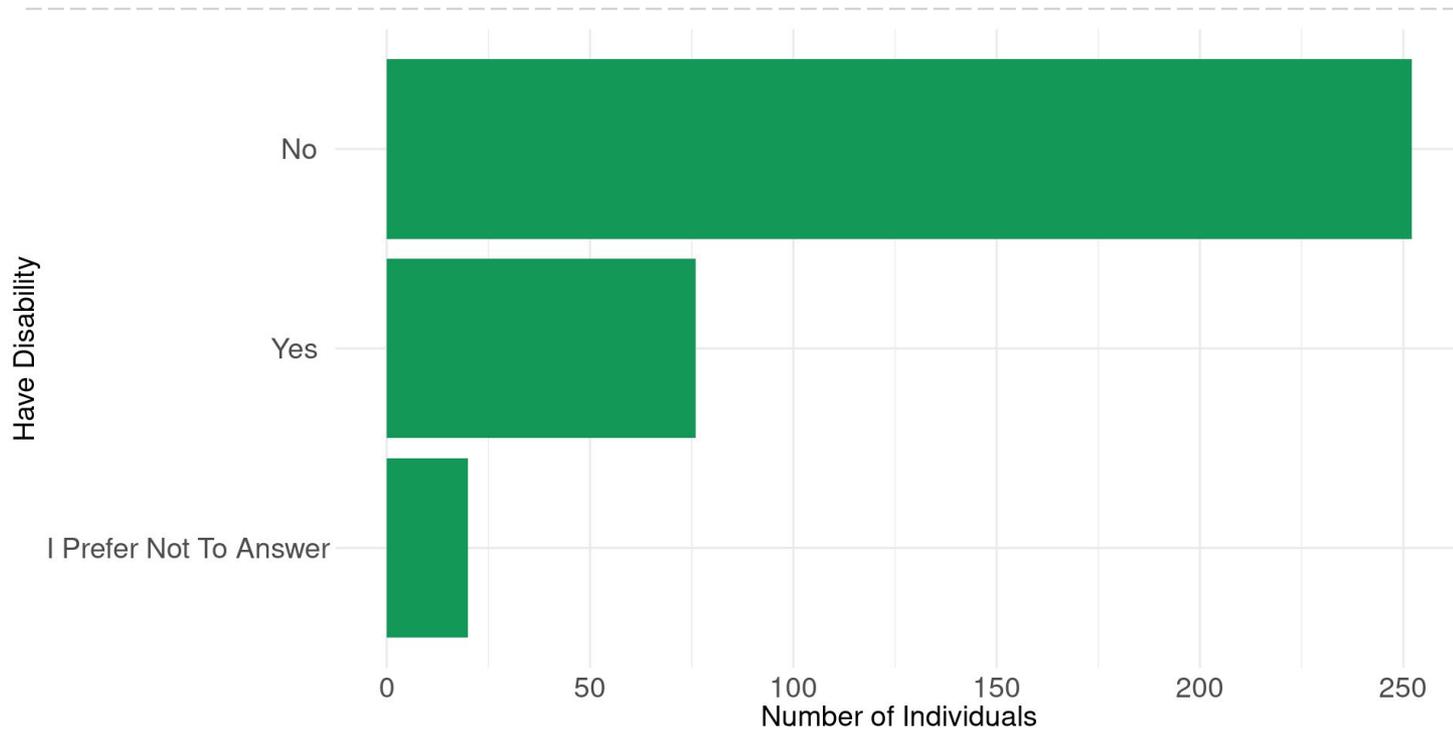
Do you identify as transgender?

Slightly more than half of respondents (56%) self-identify as straight.



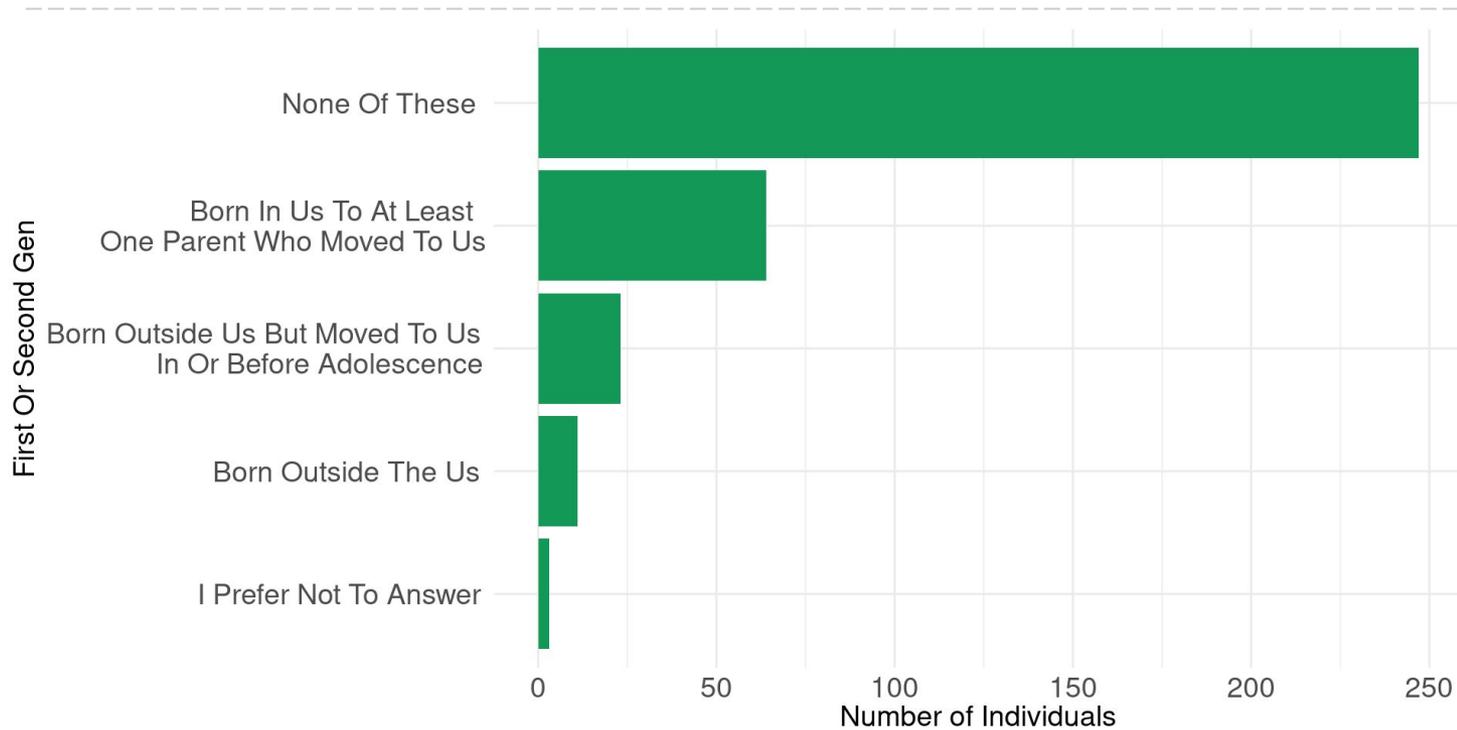
Select any and all of the following sexual orientations that you feel describe you:

Slightly less than a quarter of respondents (22%) self-identify as having a disability.



Do you have a disability (i.e., a physical or mental condition that substantially limits one or more major life activity)?

Approximately 28% of respondents are first- or second-generation immigrants to the United States.

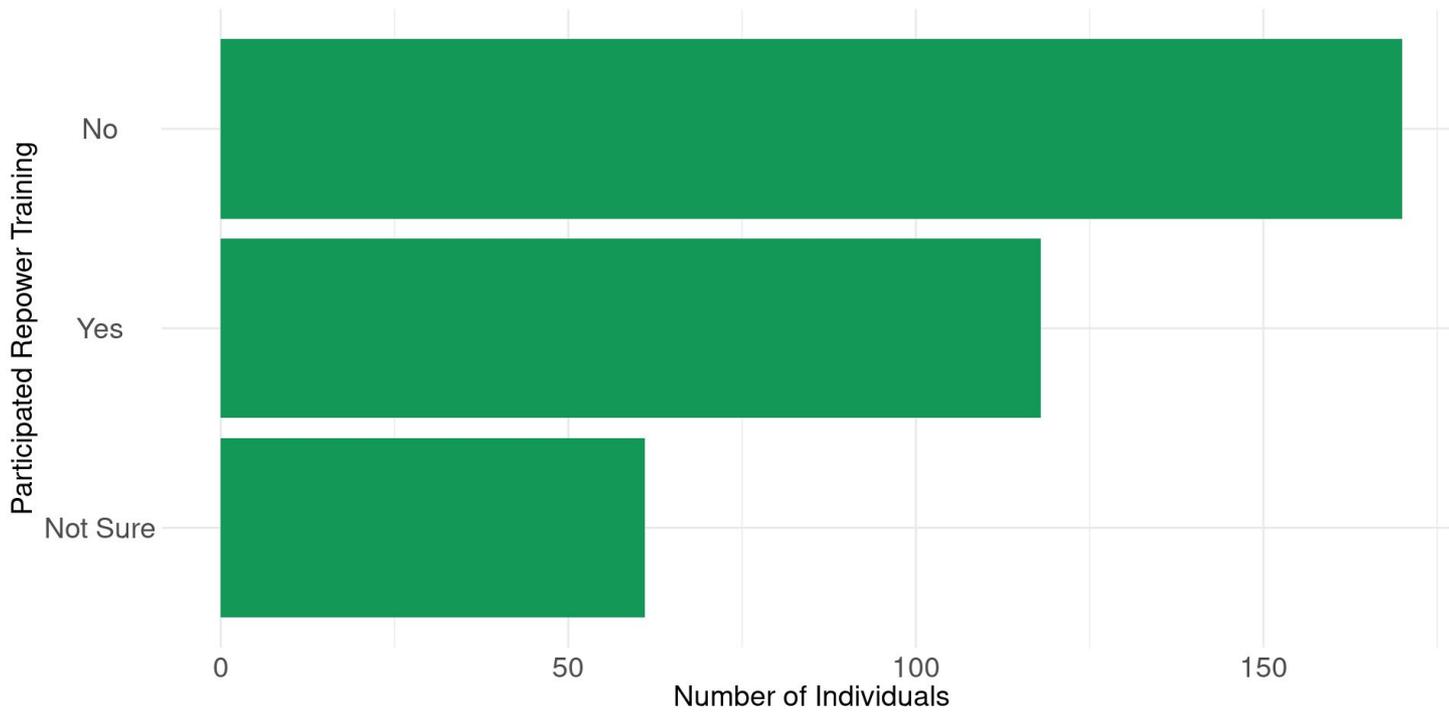


Are you a first- or second-generation immigrant to the United States?

re:power Alumni



34% of respondents are re:power alumni and another 18% are not sure if they have participated in in re:power trainings.



Have you participated in any of re:power's trainings?

Among re:power alumni, the most frequently attended previous training was Intro to Digital Organizing Online.



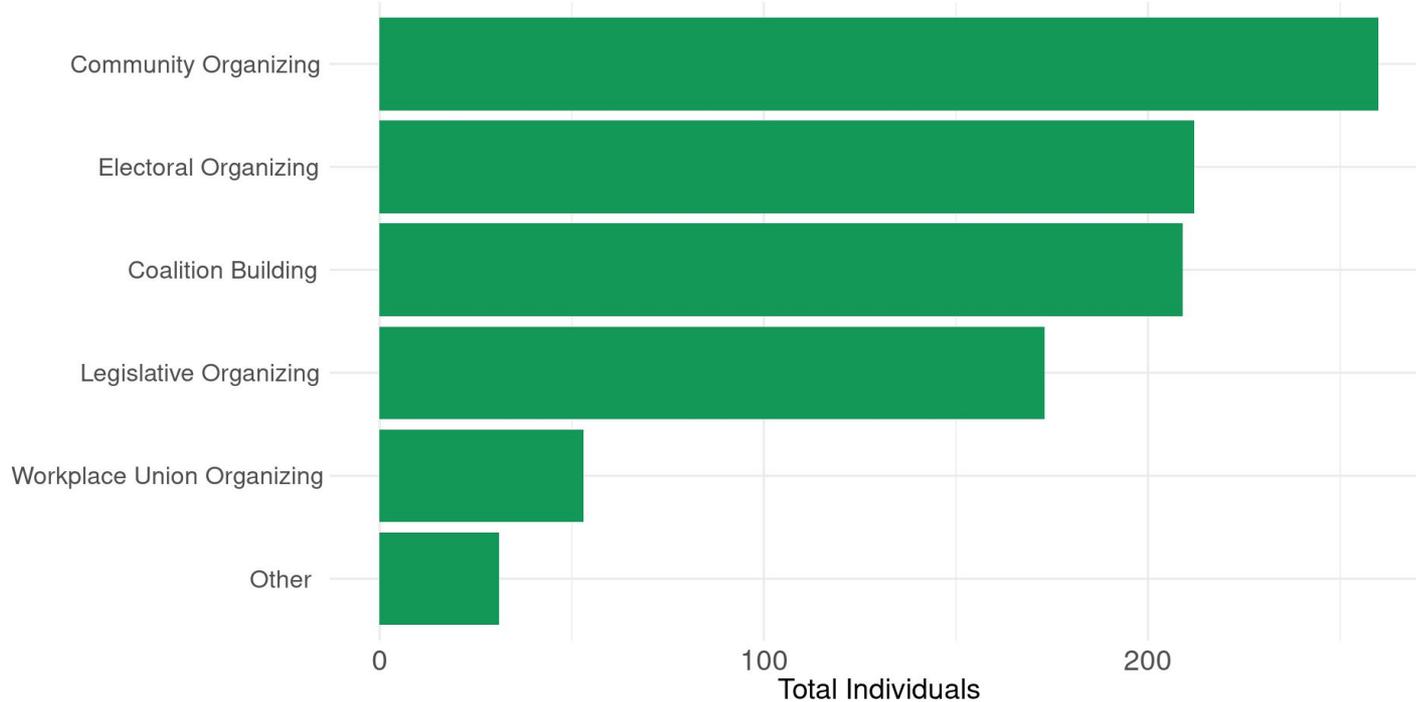
Which re:power trainings have you participated in? (check all that apply)

This represents trainings that at least 10 respondents had attended; the full list of trainings is included in the tables.

Organizing and Organization Characteristics

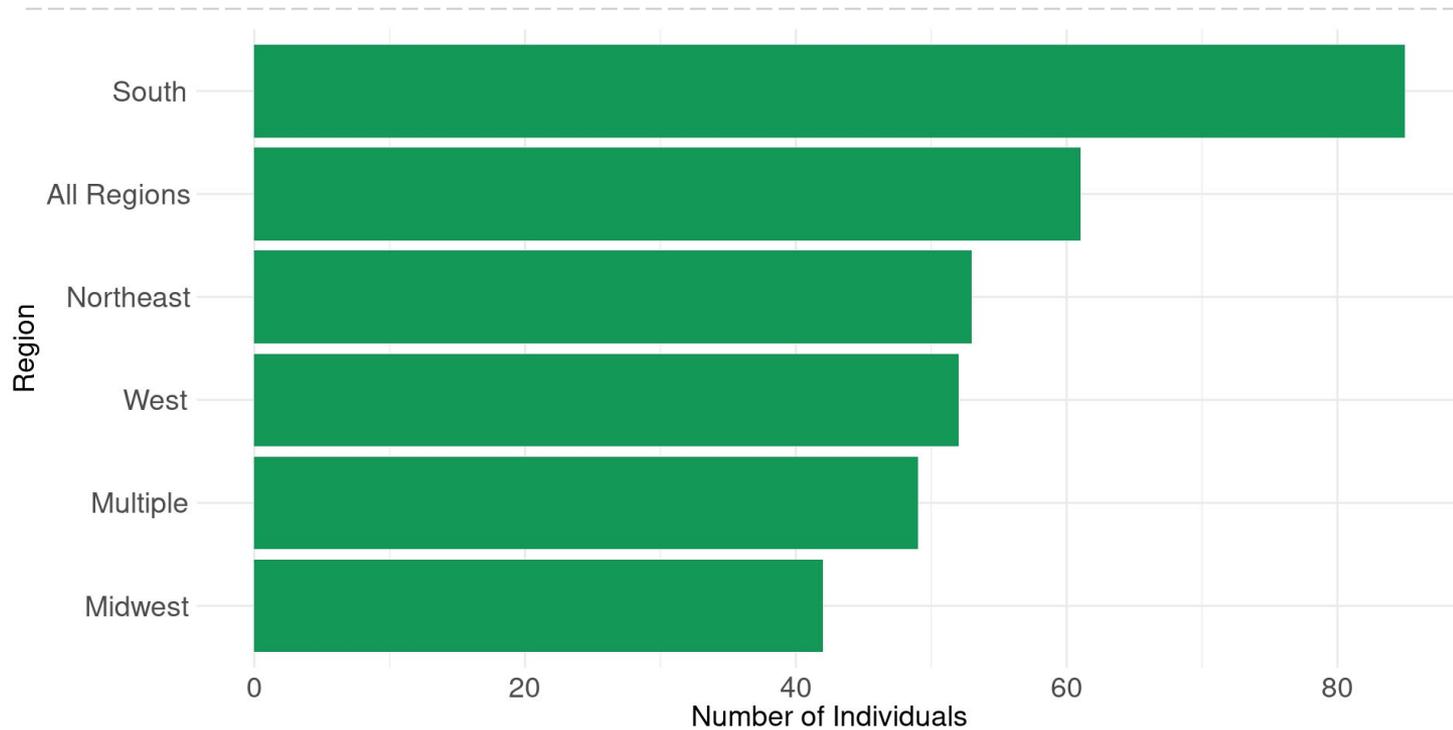


Large numbers of respondents (>50%) work in community organizing, electoral organizing, coalition building, and legislative organizing.



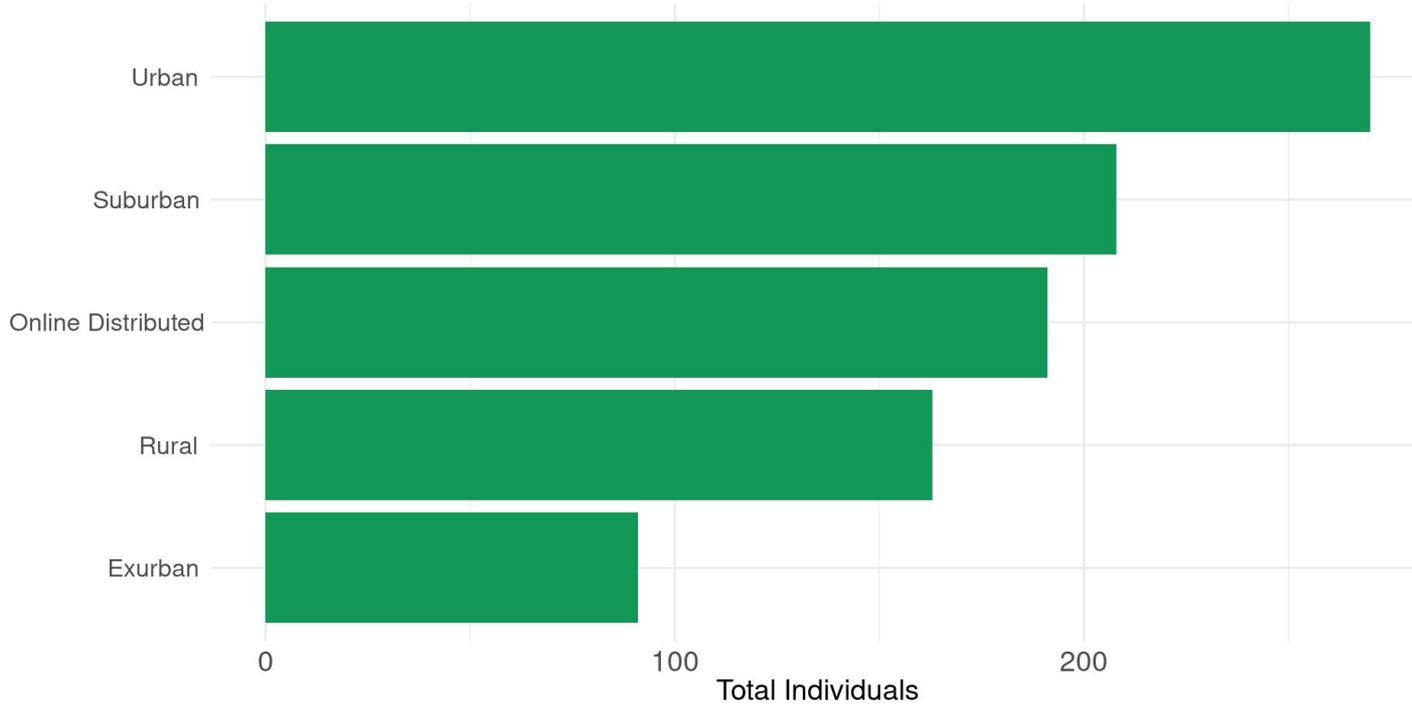
What type of organizing do you do? (check all that apply)

Nearly 1 in 5 respondents (18%) work in all states. Respondents who reported working in individual states represent every U.S. state except for Delaware, with a plurality working in the South U.S. Census region.



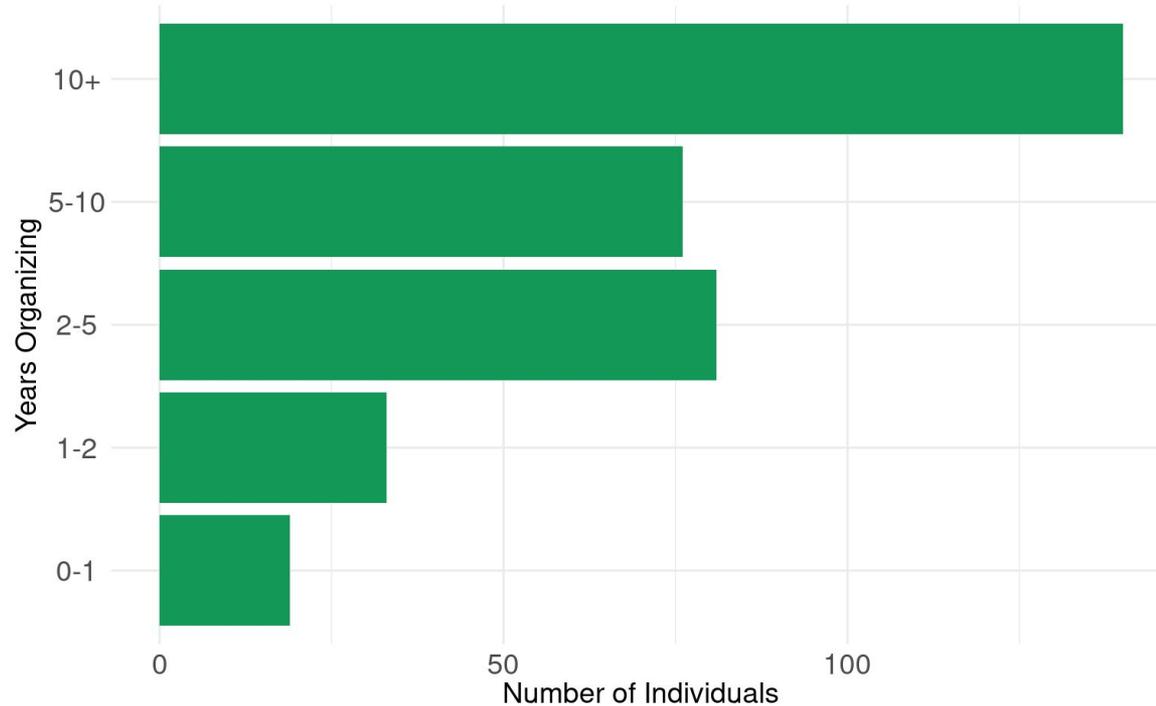
*What states do you work in?
Grouped by U.S. Census regions*

Respondents work in a range of geographic (and online) communities, with many respondents working in multiple types of communities. More than two thirds of respondents work in urban communities.



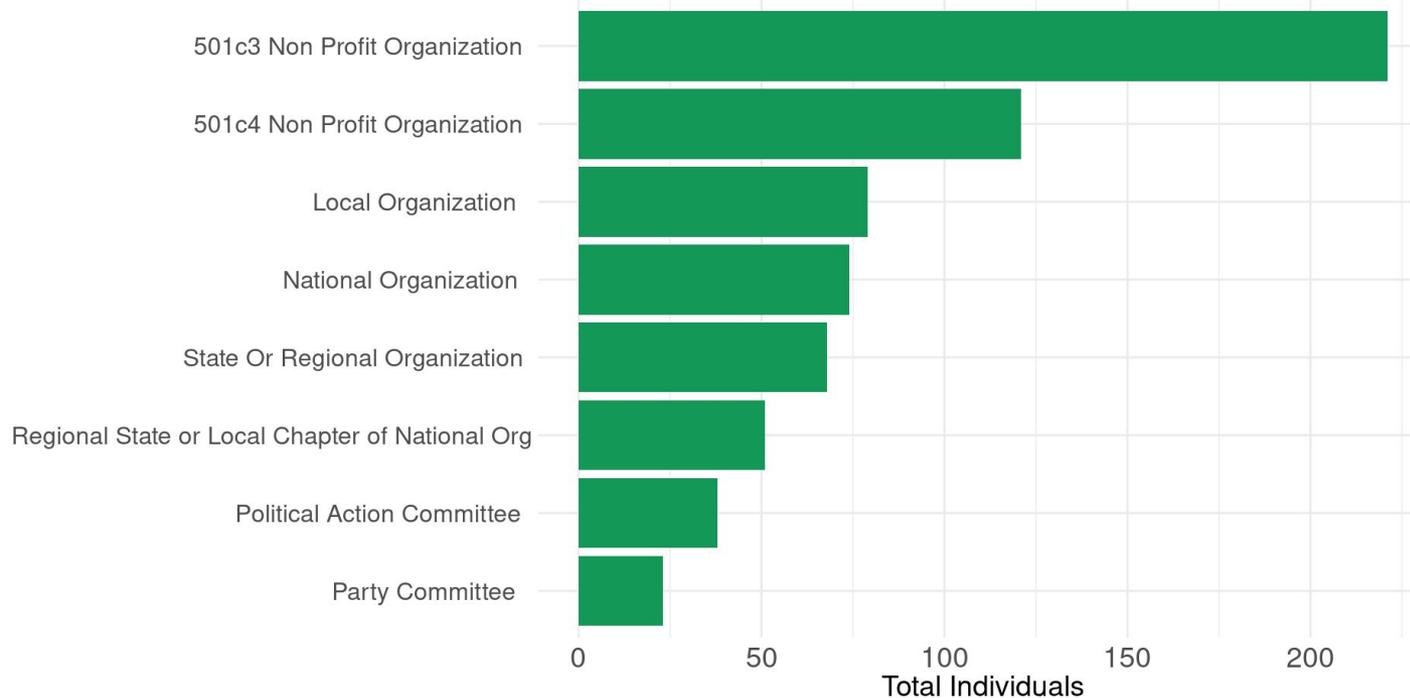
What types of geographic communities do you work in? (check all that apply)

The majority of respondents have at least five years of organizing experience, with many having 10+ years.



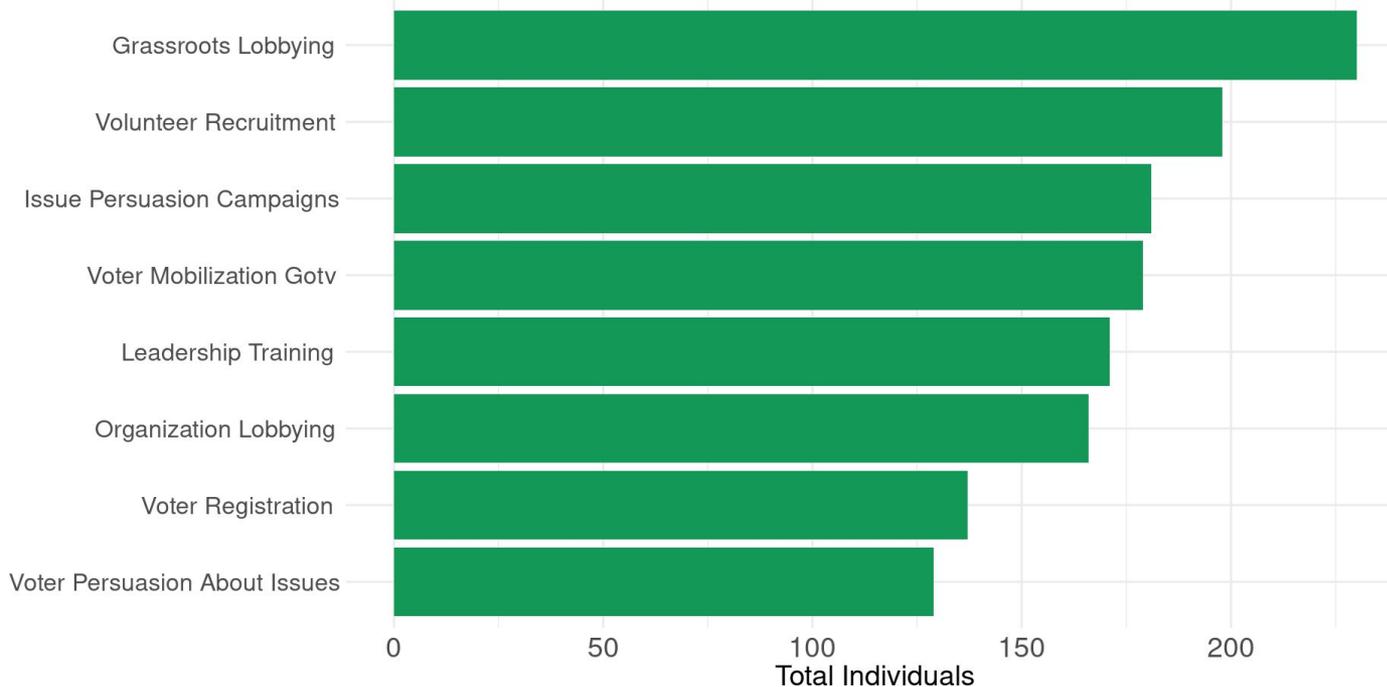
How many years of experience do you have in organizing?

The majority of respondents (63%) organize with 501c3 nonprofit organizations. Similar percentages of respondents organize with local (23%), national (21%), and state or regional (20%) organizations.



How would you describe the organization where you are an organizer? (check all that apply to the primary organization where you currently spend the most time as an organizer)

Respondent organizations were most likely to have engaged in grassroots lobbying and volunteer recruitment in 2021.



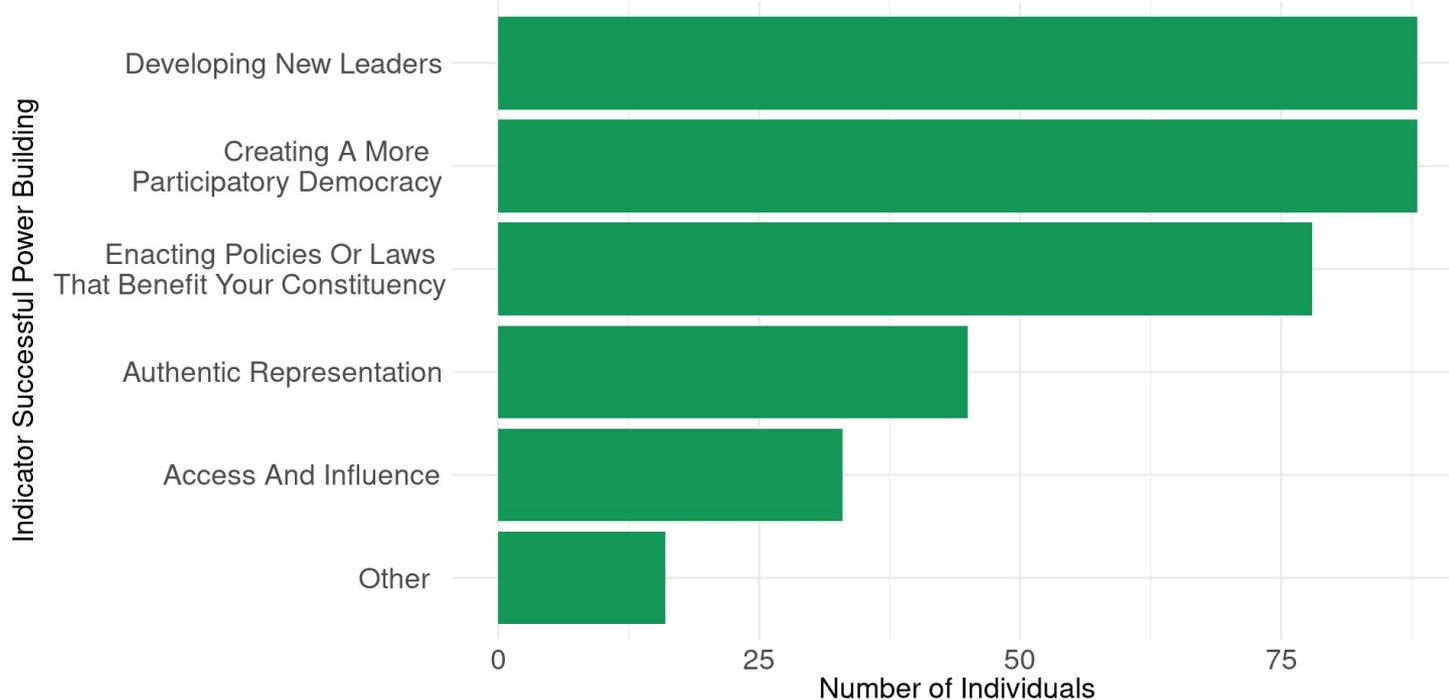
What type(s) of member/supporter/voter outreach did your organization conduct in 2021? (Select all that apply)

This represents the most frequently selected responses, the full set of responses is included in the tables.

Power Building Strategies and Challenges

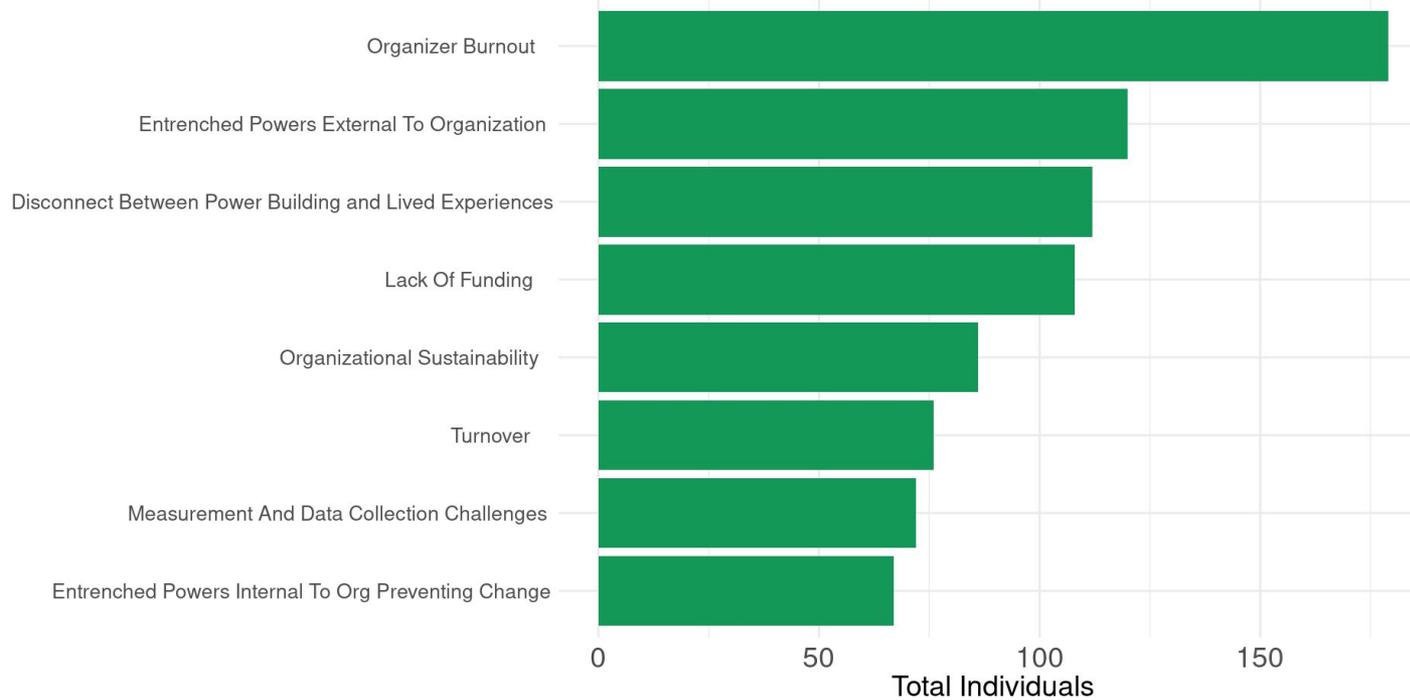


Respondents most often selected developing new leaders and creating a more participatory democracy as their organizations' top indicator of power building, closely followed by enacting policies or laws that benefit their constituencies.



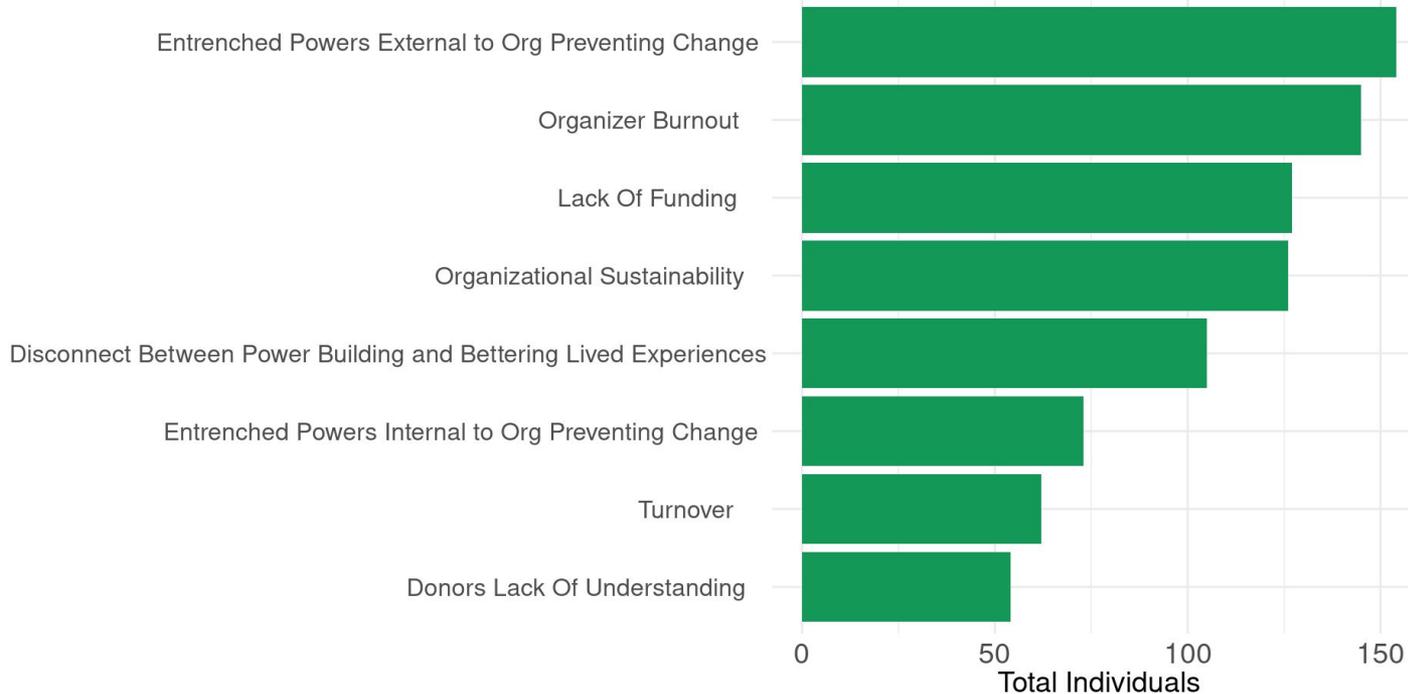
What do you see as the most important indicator of successful power building at your organization?
(Please select only one)

In the short term (i.e., the next 18 months), respondents are most concerned about organizer burnout.



Please select up to three potential challenges you are most concerned about at your organization in the short term (i.e., in the next 18 months):

In the long term (the next 5 years), respondents are still concerned about organizer burnout, but their top concern relates to entrenched powers external to their organizations preventing change.

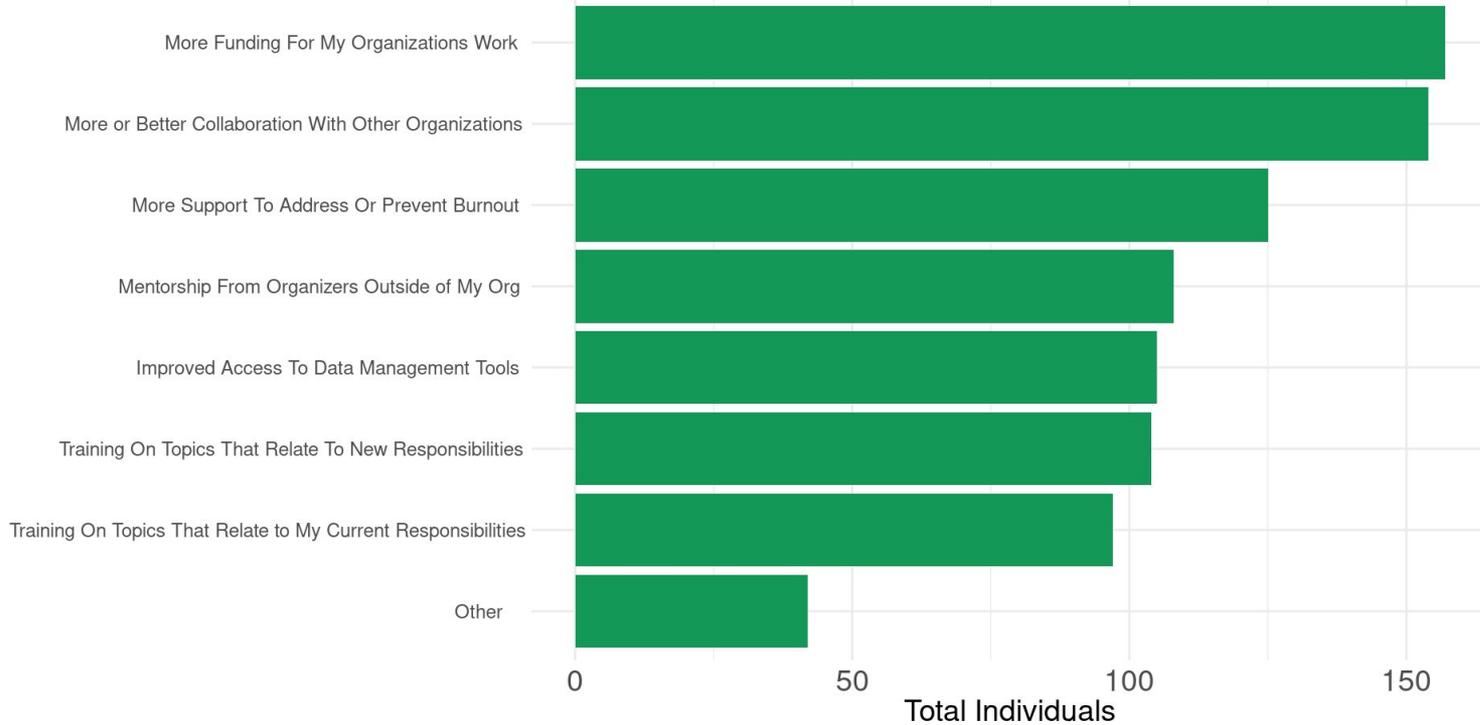


Please select up to three potential challenges you are most concerned about at your organization in the long term (i.e., in the next 5 years):

Short-Term and Long-Term Needs



Organizers most frequently cited more funding for their organizations' work, more or better collaboration with other organizations, and more support to address or prevent burnout as short-term needs.



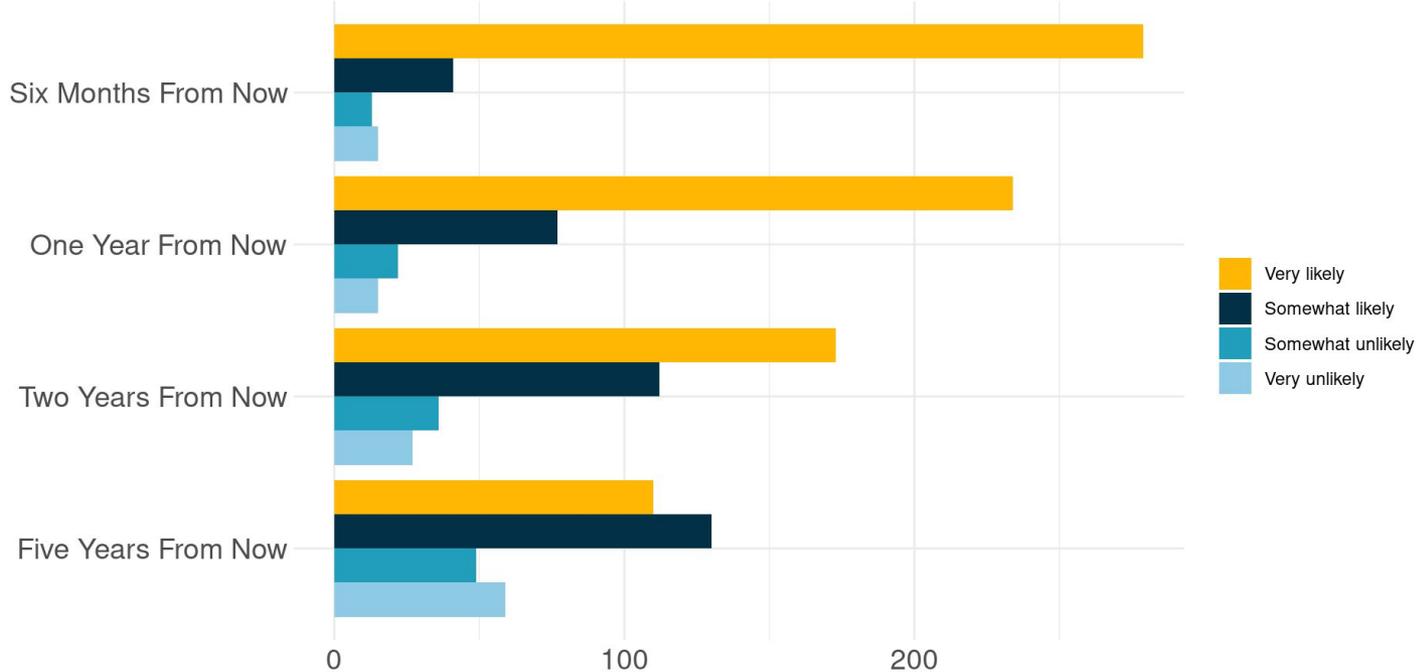
What are the top three things you would benefit from in the short term (i.e., in the next 18 months) to be more effective as an organizer? (select up to three)

Organizers also most frequently cited more funding for their organizations' work, more or better collaboration with other organizations, and more support to address or prevent burnout as long-term needs.



If you continue to work or volunteer in organizing, what are the top three things you need in the long term (i.e., in the next 5 years) to be more effective as an organizer?

While almost all respondents expect to still be working or volunteering in organizing six months from now, only 32% are very likely to be doing so five years from now.



How likely is it that you will still be working or volunteering in organizing (either in your current role or in another organizing role) at each of the following intervals?

Organizers who are **unlikely** to still be organizing in two years identified **more support to address or prevent burnout** as a short-term need equal to needs for better collaboration with other organizations and more funding.



*For respondents somewhat or very unlikely to still be organizing in 2 years:
What are the top three things you would benefit from in the short term (i.e., in the next 18 months) to be more effective as an organizer? (select up to three)*

Training Needs



Respondents expressed interest in a range of trainings; the three options most frequently selected were *Building Organizing Relationships*, *Power Mapping*, and *Finding Our People and Building Community*, but these were closely followed by the next most popular choices.



Which of the following types of training would benefit you or someone else at your organization?
(check all that apply)

Additional trainings selected by fewer respondents are included in the tables.

Black respondents were most interested in the *Women of Color Leadership Cohort*, followed closely by *Building Organizing Relationships*.



*For Black respondents only:
Which of the following types of training would benefit you or someone else at your organization?
(check all that apply)
Additional trainings selected by fewer respondents are included in the tables.*

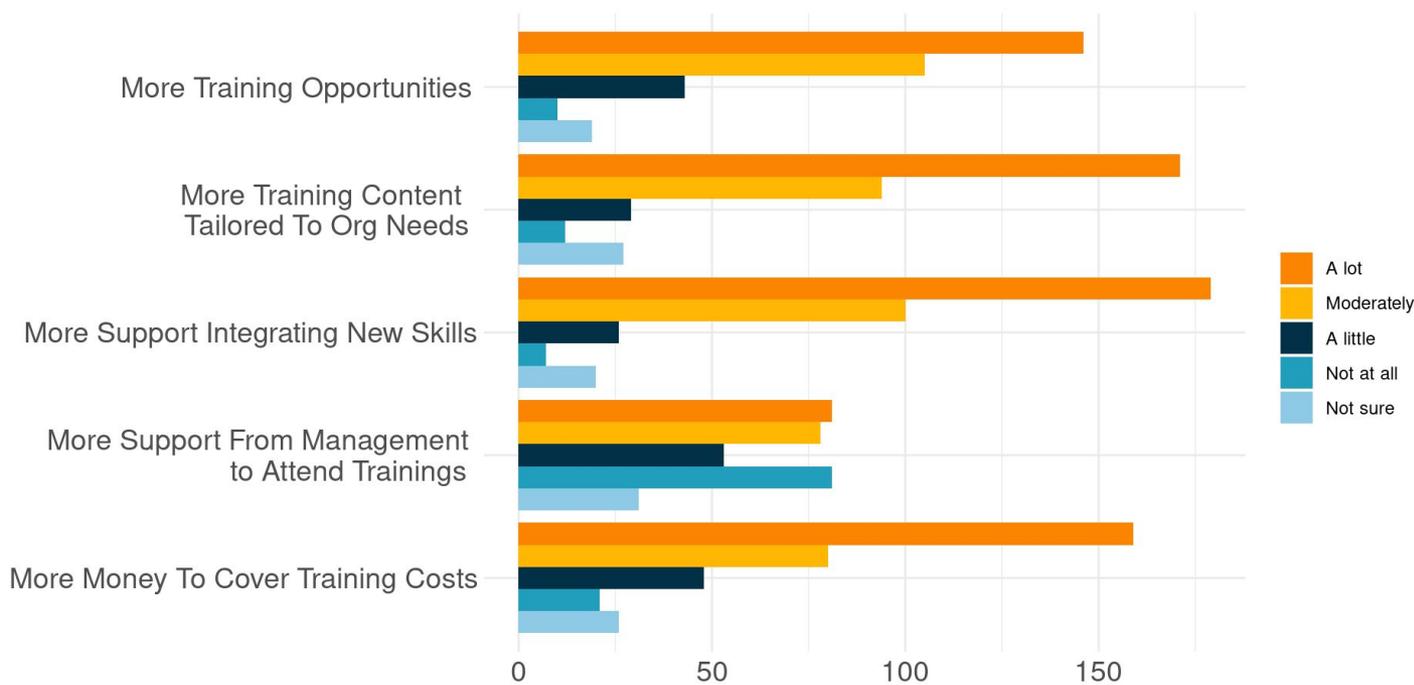
When asked about the top three trainings that interested them most, 50+ respondents selected each of the following options: *Women of Color Leadership Cohort*, *Finding Our People and Building Community*, and *Building Organizing Relationships*.



Which of the following types of training would benefit you or someone else at your organization?
(check all that apply)

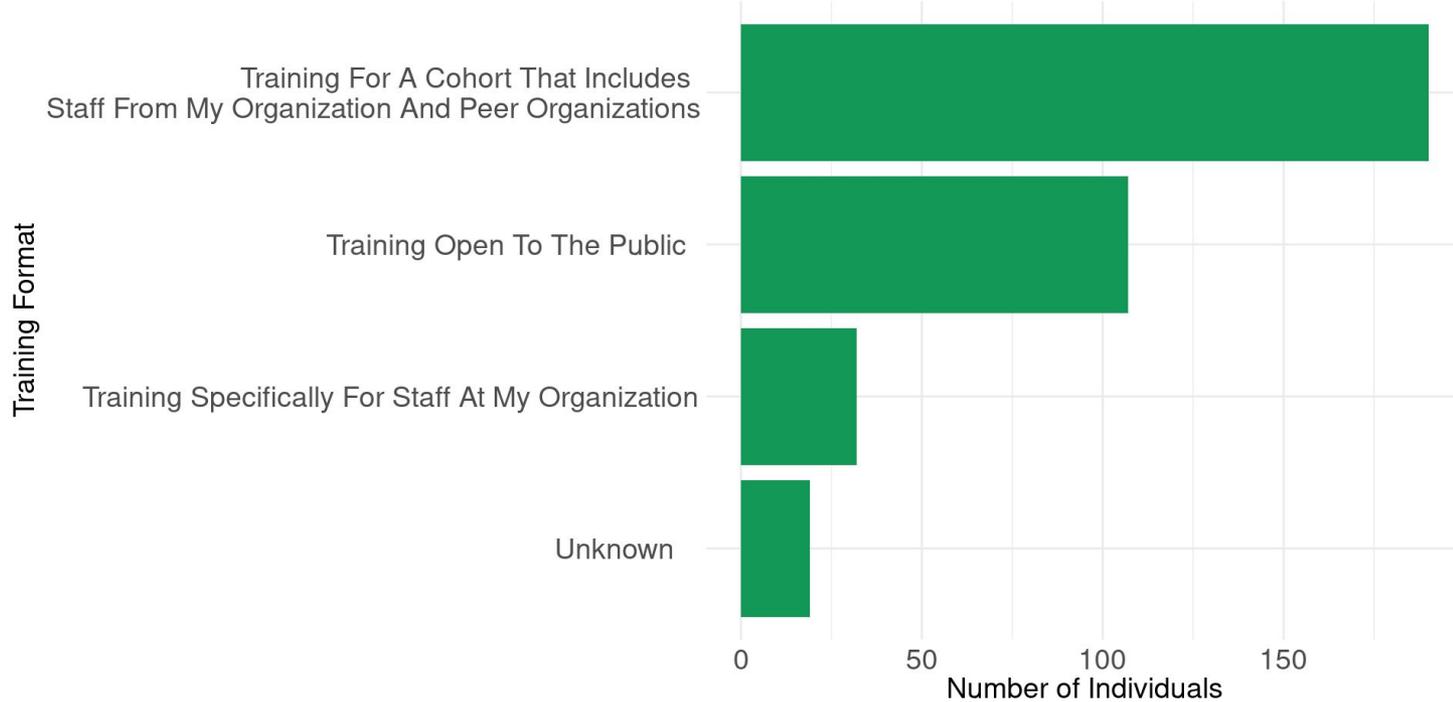
Additional trainings selected by fewer respondents are included in the tables.

Respondents were most likely to say that more support integrating new skills into their work and more training content tailored to their organization would help “a lot” to increase the benefit of training opportunities.



To what extent would each of these potential supports help your organization benefit more from training opportunities when they are offered? (select all that apply)

Respondents are most interested in cohort trainings that include staff from their organizations and peer organizations, though many respondents are also interested in trainings that are open to the public.



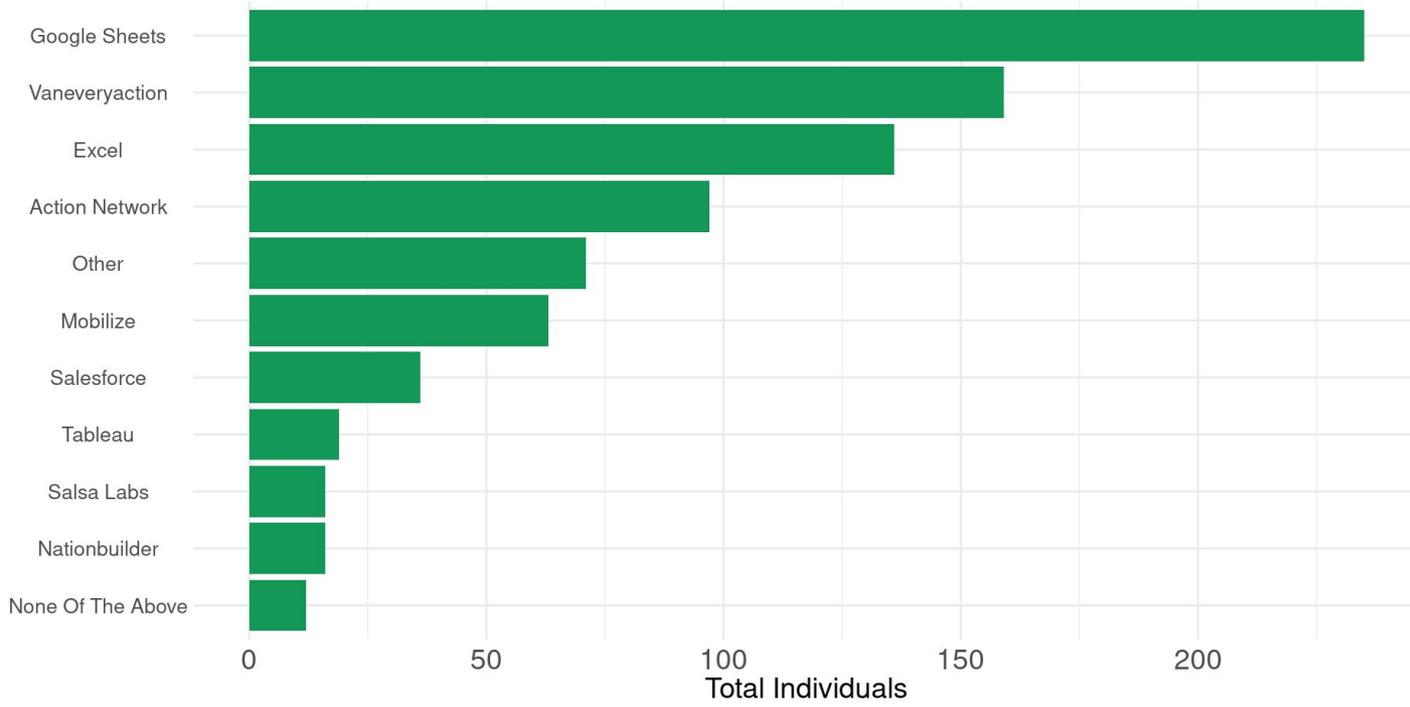
What training format are you most interested in? (check one)

Data Needs



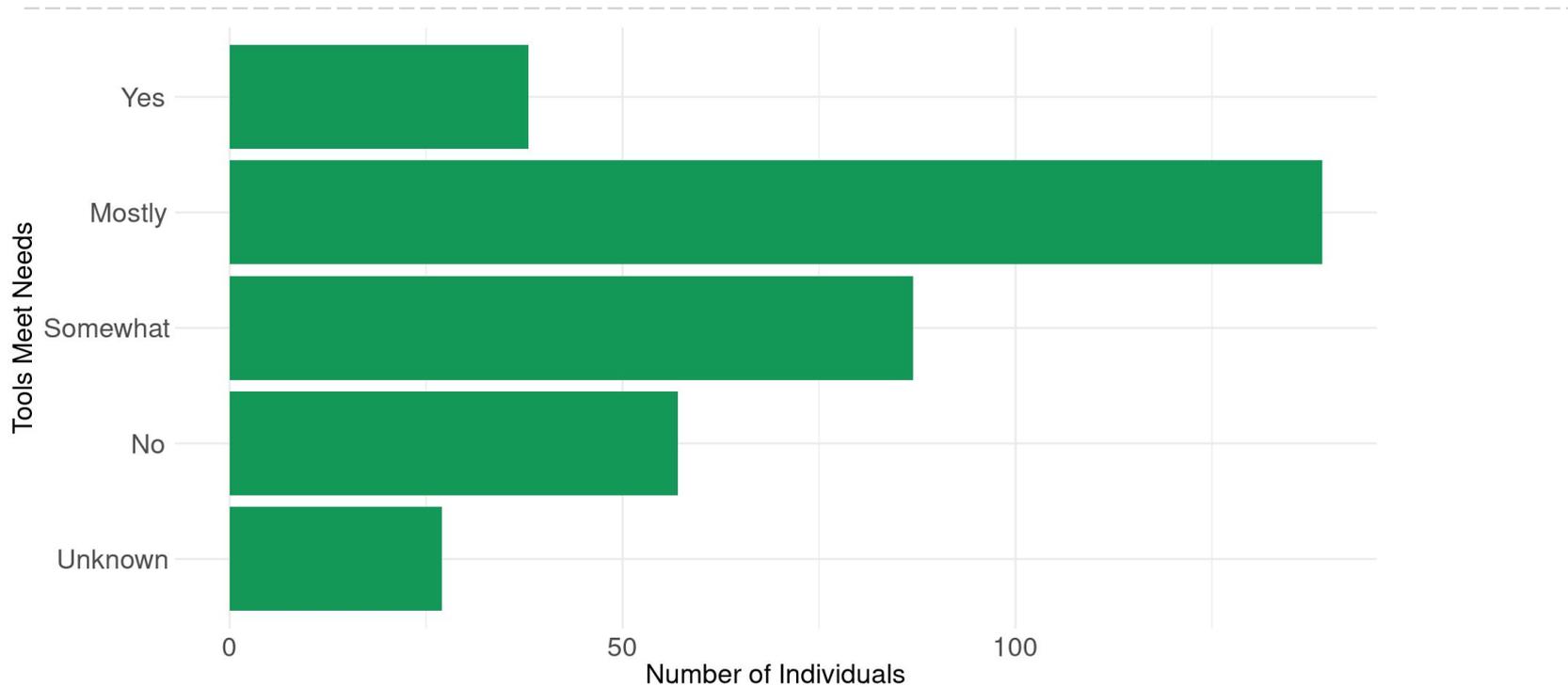
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Respondents use a variety of tools to manage data. Google Sheets, VAN/EveryAction, and Excel are the most commonly used tools among respondents.



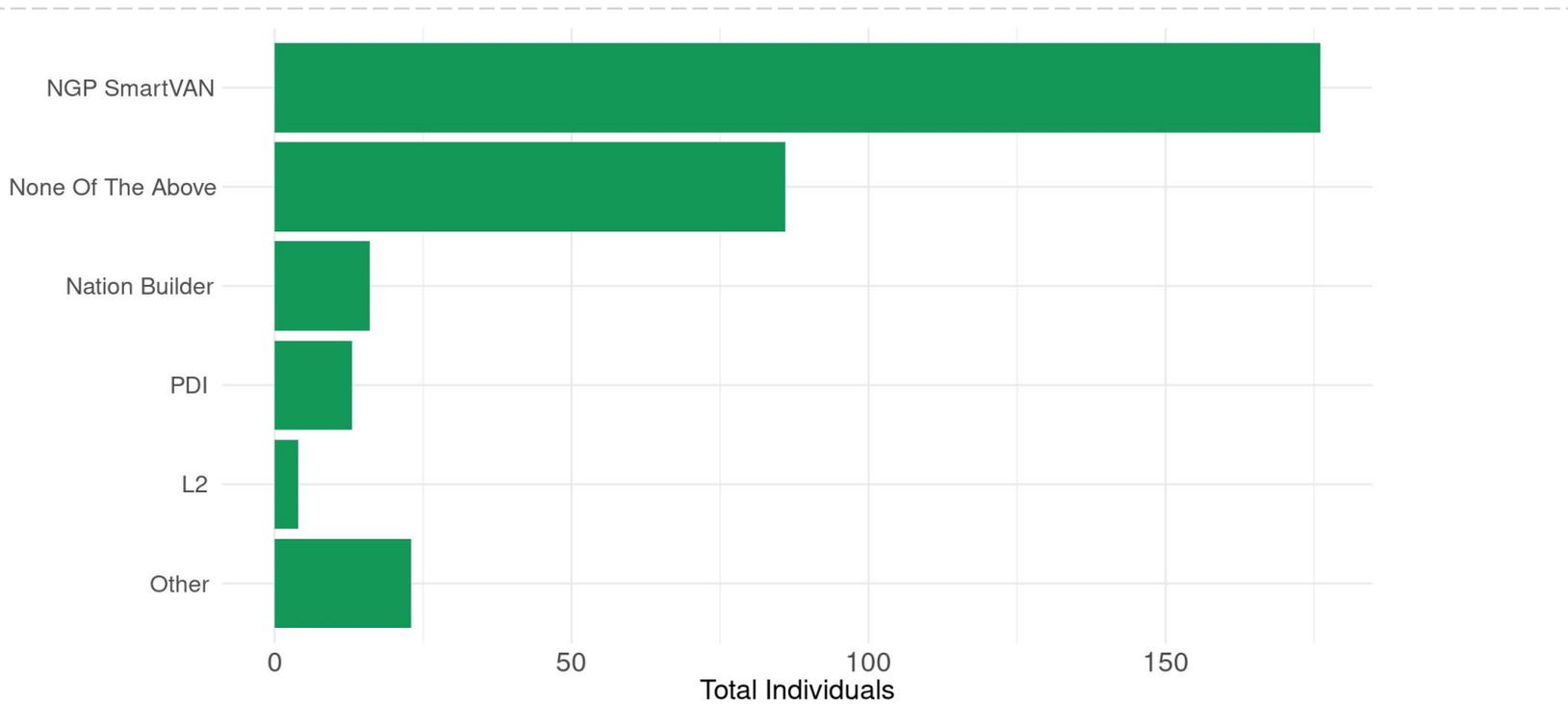
Which of the following tools is your organization currently using to manage data? (check all that apply)

Only 11% of respondents report that the data management tools their organizations currently use fully meet their needs.



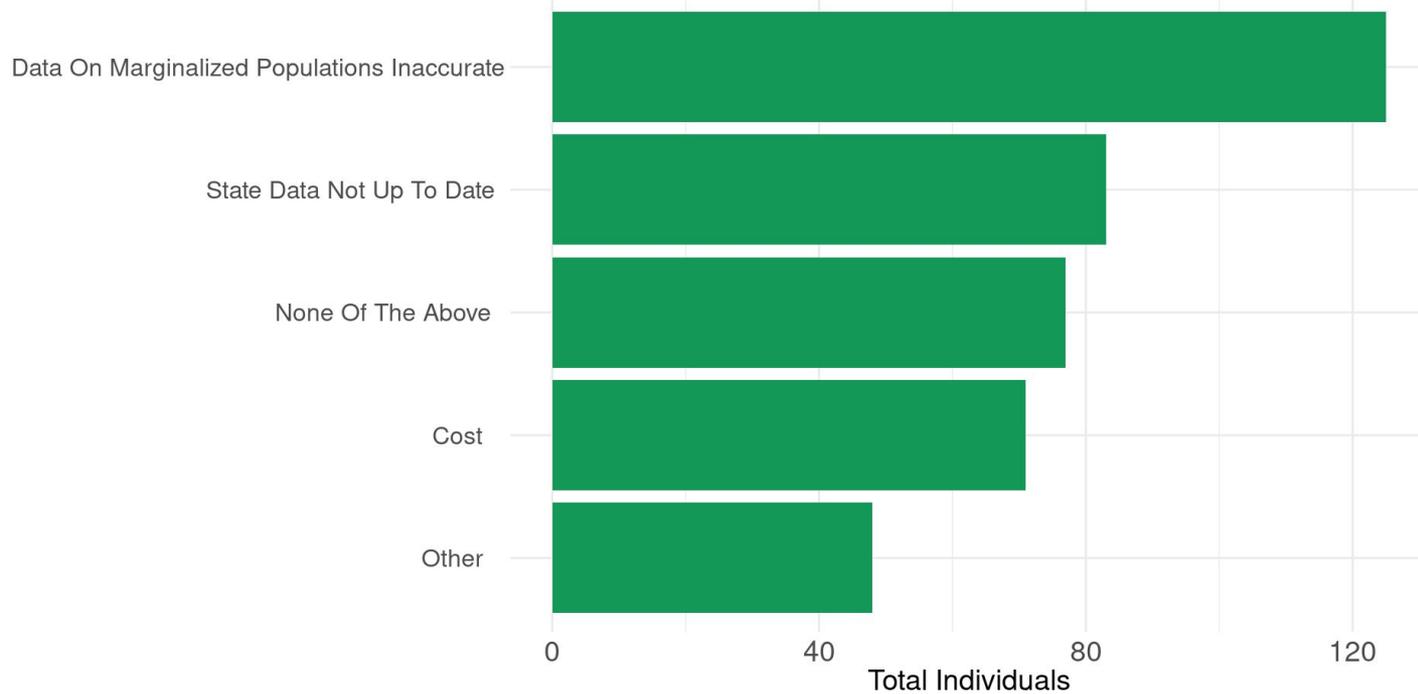
Do the data management tools your organization is using now meet your organization's needs?

The majority of respondents whose organizations access voter file data use NGPSmartVAN.



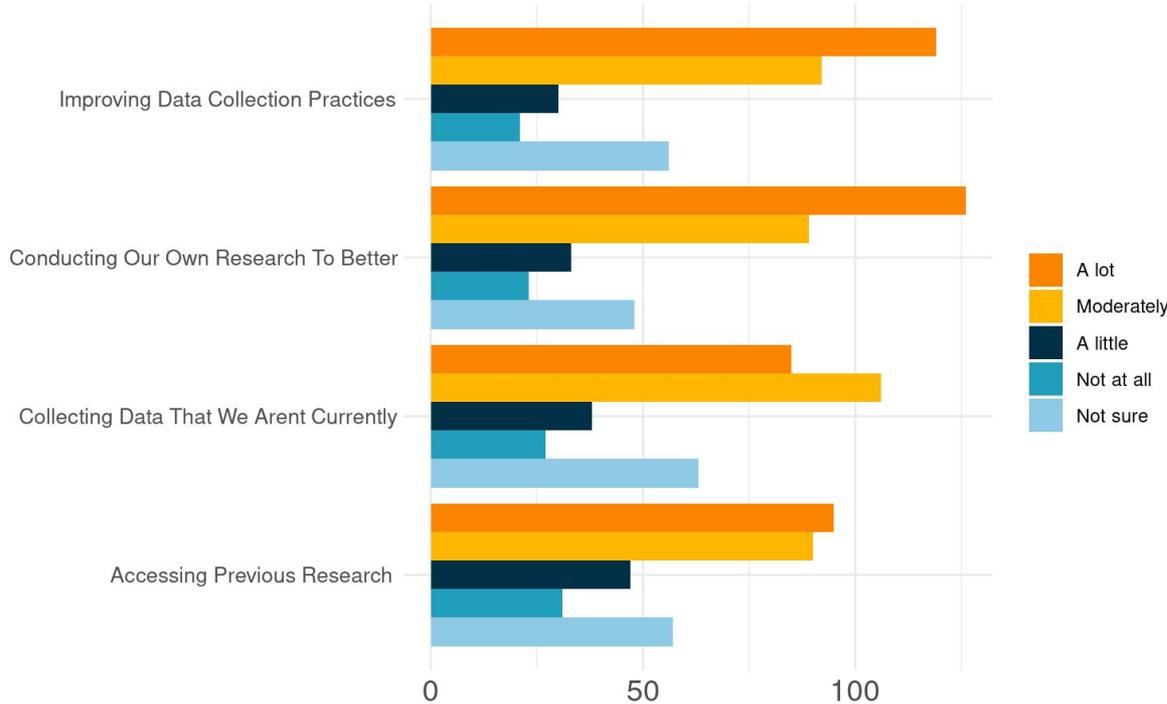
Which of the following sources does your organization use to access voter data? (check all that apply)

Among respondents who reported that their organizations experienced challenges with obtaining or using voter data, respondents most often cited **data on marginalized populations being inaccurate** as a challenge.



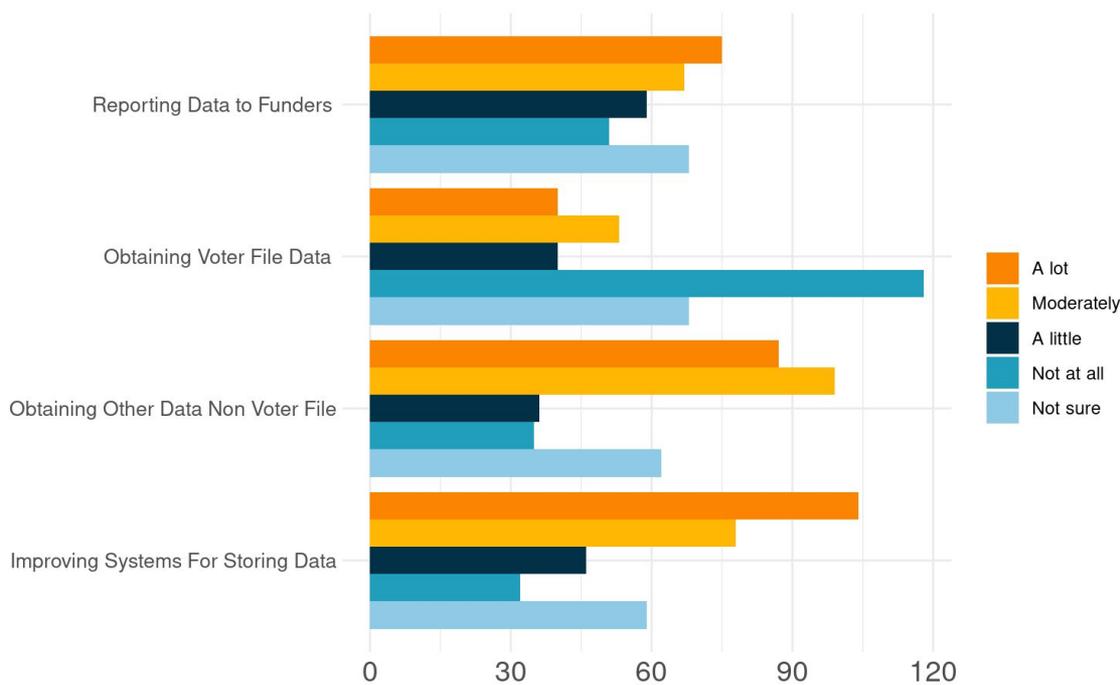
What challenges has your organization experienced with obtaining or using voter data? (check all that apply)

Many respondents reported needing a lot of support or a moderate amount of support around conducting their own research and improving data collection practices.



To what extent does your organization need additional support in any of the following areas relating to data and research:

Many respondents also reported needing a lot of support or a moderate amount of support around improving systems for storing data.

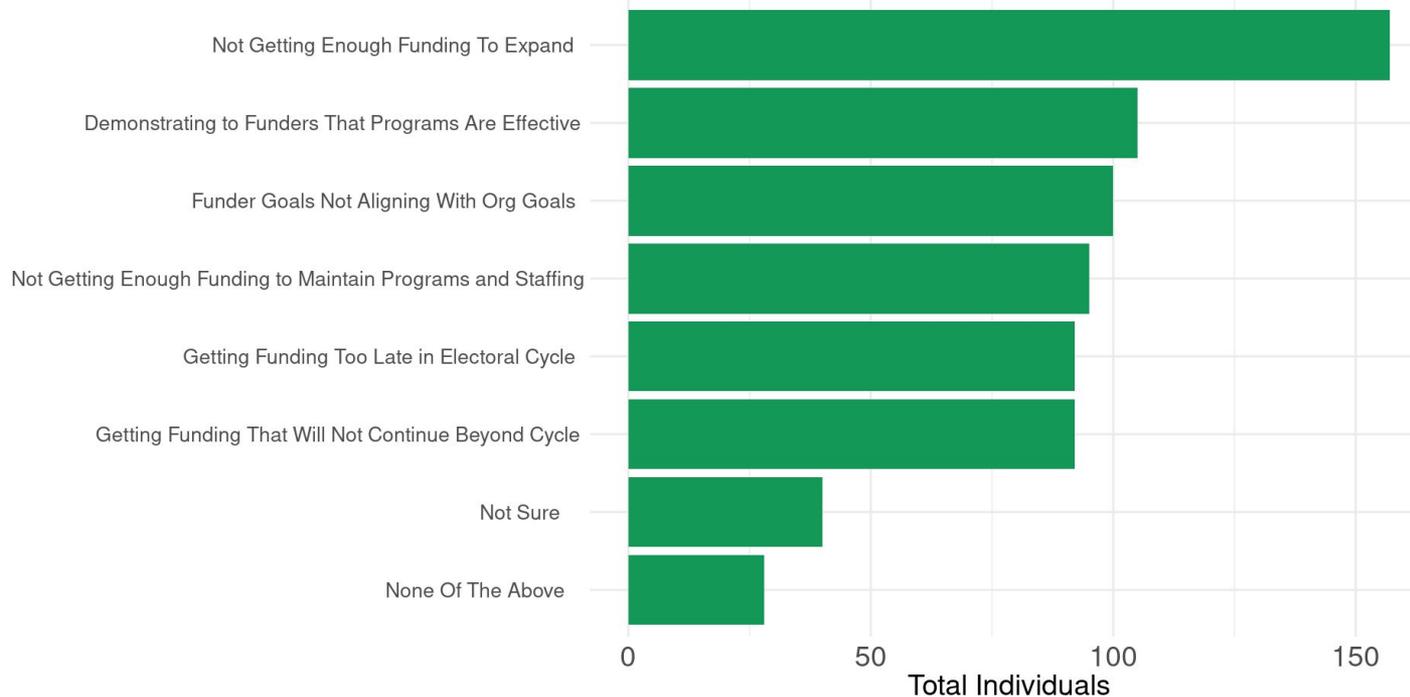


To what extent does your organization need additional support in any of the following areas relating to data and research:

Funding Needs



Respondents anticipate a number of funding-related challenges in the next 18 months. The most frequently cited challenge is not getting enough funding to expand current programs and staffing.



*What challenges do you anticipate your organization facing in the next 18 months relating to funding?
(select all that apply)*

Natural Language Processing Topic Modeling



Topic Modeling

- Analyst Institute used natural language processing to build topic models for each of the following open-ended questions:
 - What strategies have been successful for power building in the communities you serve?
 - What would address or prevent burnout among organizers?
 - What longer-term challenges do you anticipate facing in the next five years relating to obtaining and sustaining funding at your organization?
- The detailed results here include the top words included in responses that contain language relating to specific “topics” identified by the models and links to the survey responses most closely related to that topic.

Successful strategies for power building

Topic 1: Building strong community relationships

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: building, deep, power, conversations, person, coalition, training, canvassing, relationship, and media.
- Responses highlighted the benefits of:
 - Maintaining a presence in the community
 - Building person-to-person relationships (including as part of door-to-door canvassing)
 - Amplifying the voices of local organizers and volunteers
 - Building a supportive organizational infrastructure (through training, check-ins, etc.)
 - Coordinating local organizing with state and national efforts

Successful strategies for power building

Topic 2: Policy change through community leadership

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: local, community, campaigns, training, build, people, providing, building, organizing, and issues.
- Many of these responses relate to working to change policies, whether through advocacy work or through supporting local candidates for office. Some responses highlighted specific issues or referenced ways organizations engage their constituents around specific issues.
- Responses also highlighted the need to support and prioritize community leadership.

Successful strategies for power building

Topic 3: Empowering members with meaningful action-taking opportunities

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: candidate, build, action, people, successful, elected, officials, folks, leaders, and feel.
- Many of these responses mention specific activities like postcard writing, meetings with officials, public art, and candidate forums. These activities can be used to empower members and volunteers, including developing them as leaders.
- Responses highlighted the need to listen to volunteers in order to engage them meaningfully and not to take them for granted.

Successful strategies for power building

Topic 4: Individualizing engagement approaches

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: door, organizing, engagement, resources, people, communities, relational, 1, meeting, and peer.
- Many of these responses mentioned 1:1 interactions, particularly door to door canvassing.
- Another related theme was “meeting people where they’re at” by giving them choices to maximize participation (hybrid in-person/online engagement menu of ways to make a difference) and having authentic, honest conversations.
- Multiple comments also mentioned using multiple languages to engage diverse communities.

Successful strategies for power building

Topic 5: Applying “classic” organizing strategies in new contexts

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: grassroots, community, organizing, building, people, events, direct, meetings, leadership, and development.
- Some responses referenced the civil rights movement, Marshall Ganz, and “classic organizing.” Responses also described ways strategies can be modified to adapt to COVID and to better engage youth.
 - Multiple responses discussed ways to engage youth, including speaking at schools, using social media, and offering free giveaways to encourage participation at in person events.
- Several responses included references to relational organizing; responses also mentioned workshops, rallies, marches, direct action, community meetings, and mutual aid.

Addressing organizer burnout

Topic 1: Value and support organizers

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: people, staff, benefits, time, funding, paid, organizers, culture, pay, and hours.
- Responses highlighted the need for organizations to demonstrate that they value organizers. This could be demonstrated through limiting hours worked, pay that aligns with workload, paid sabbaticals, creating joy and community, and regular gatherings focused on activists themselves rather than issues they need to solve.
- One response also noted that funders need to problem-solve to address current practices of supporting work at a pace that leads to burnout.

Addressing organizer burnout

Topic 2: Devote resources to preventing burnout

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: support, time, organizers, organizer, burnout, prevent, organization, week, change, and money.
- Multiple responses touched on the potentially cyclical nature of burnout, which could be mitigated with additional time off to decompress (sabbaticals, 4 day work weeks, etc.). However, respondents note that additional paid time off is not enough to *prevent* burnout.
- Responses mentioned meeting the mental health needs of organizers, unionizing, compensating organizers rather than relying on free (volunteer) labor, and not expecting organizers to devote “every waking hour” to their work. One respondent identified funder-related tactical constraints as a potential cause of organizer burnout.

Addressing organizer burnout

Topic 3: Use sustainable funding to support better work environments

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: leadership, support, people, funding, organizers, resources, organization, tools, organizations, and training.
- Several of these responses relate in some way to work environment, touching on leadership, turnover, strategy, training, and culture.
- Many of these responses also relate to funding, particularly highlighting the need for sustainable funding that can support organizations' ambitious year-round goals.

Addressing organizer burnout

Topic 4: Support organizing staff with holistic and realistic approaches

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: people, care, time, funding, organizers, culture, vacation, organizing, health, and folks.
- These responses center the need for organizers' employers to take a **holistic and realistic approach to decisions that impact staff relating to wages, benefits, division of labor, and culture**. Examples could include:
 - Ending the notion of one-organizer-per-effort so staff can better support each other as a team;
 - Reconsidering factors that influence current pay structures; and
 - Increasing flexibility around deadlines when conditions change.
- This work could be augmented by an employee union.
- This topic was the **most prevalent** across all open-ended responses about burnout.

Long-term funding challenges

Topic 1: Competition for sustainable funding that is aligned with organizational priorities

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: funds, funding, maintain, money, organizations, lack, raise, goals, 5, texas, nonprofit, consistent, stuff, deep, and stop.
- All of the “topics” identified by this model include responses that discuss the need for **sustainable funding**.
- In addition to the need for sustainability, these responses describe the challenges of fundraising for the work organizations want to prioritize (e.g., the most “hard-hitting” or timely work), competition for limited funding resources among allied organizations, and fundraising staff turnover.

Long-term funding challenges

Topic 2: Threat of donor fatigue/loss of interest

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: funders, donor, fund, organization, structure, organizing, donors, staff, lose, volunteers, turnover, gun, violence, 2, policy, funded, and goal.
- All of the “topics” identified by this model include responses that discuss the need for **sustainable funding**.
- In addition to the need for sustainability, these responses describe the threat of donor fatigue around certain topics (e.g., gun violence) or geographies. Additionally, responses mentioned challenges relating to organizational priorities (e.g., funding policy work as a priority over organizing).

Long-term funding challenges

Topic 3: Getting sustainable funding for ongoing work

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: base, building, funders, build, funding, organization, money, organizing, org, cycle, power, ongoing, foundations, infrastructure, ready, and corporate.
- Again, this topic emphasized the need for **sustainable funding**. Specific needs that require sustainable funding include: long-term persuasion programming, ballot initiative work, membership recruitment, and power building.
- This topic was the **most prevalent** across all open-ended responses about funding, particularly among Black organizers.

Long-term funding challenges

Topic 4: Lack of support for longer-term organizing strategies

- These responses mentioned combinations of the words: building, model, funders, funding, cycles, organizing, difficult, election, hard, and lost.
- Again, this topic emphasized the need for **sustainable funding**. Here, multiple responses cited the challenges of “boom and bust” funding, which can not only lead to gaps in funding, but can mean that funding comes too late to be of benefit, even during a boom.
- Additionally, multiple responses described challenges or anticipated challenges getting funding when organizational strategies change, such as a food bank becoming a social justice organization or an organization shifting from more transaction strategies to focus on base building.

Conclusions



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What can the progressive community do to address organizer needs?

- Provide **sustainable funding**, including for longer-term organizing work, avoiding the pitfalls of “boom and bust” funding
 - Reduce competition for limited funding among allied organizations
- Improve voter file data on **marginalized populations** in order to support the work of organizations aiming to engage and serve these populations
- Support organizer-driven **research on their own programs**, including supporting improvements to **data collection systems and practices**

What else can the progressive community do to address organizer needs?

- **Fund trainings** and provide **continued support post-training**; organizers have a wide range of training interests and many are particularly interested in participating in trainings with peer organizations
- Address (and if possible, prevent) **organizer burnout** at a systems level rather than at the individual level; organizations can do this by adopting holistic and realistic approaches to decisions that impact staff relating to wages, benefits, division of labor, and culture
- Demonstrate the **impact of power building work** on bettering lived experiences, potentially through **redefining wins**

Thank You!

re:power and PoliSol

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