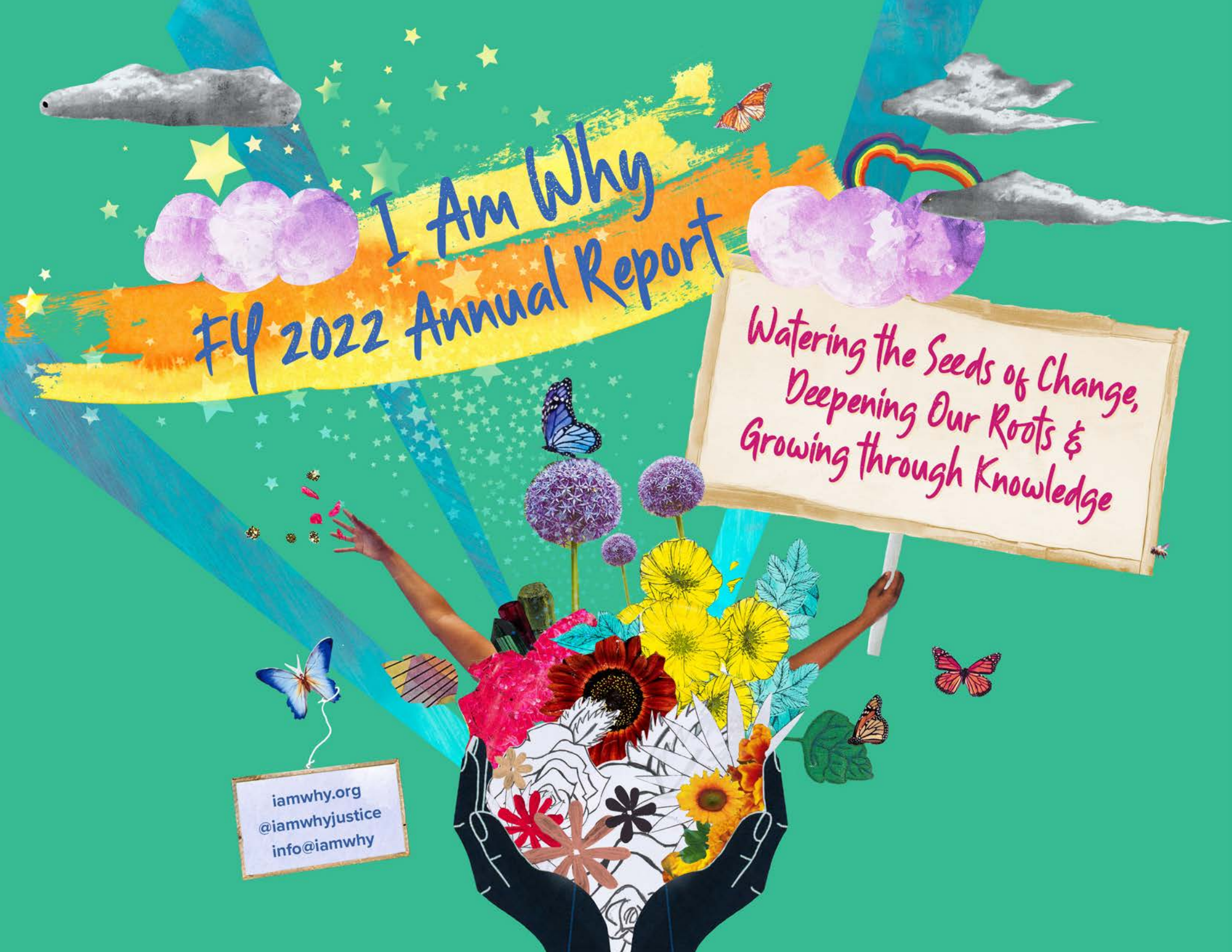


I Am Why FY 2022 Annual Report

Watering the Seeds of Change,
Deepening Our Roots &
Growing Through Knowledge

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Introduction

Introduction

This past year has been one of tremendous growth and learning for *I Am Why*. We brought on new consultants, launched creative projects, conducted our first in-person workshops in two years, developed robust partnerships and hired our first full-time staff member. We also invested in professional development for our consultants, conducted case studies of our work and thoroughly assessed all of our activities. We are solidifying our organization while thinking expansively about new partnerships and activities.

Read on to learn more about how we are watering the seeds of change through activism, deepening our roots to build organizational strength and energy and growing through learning and reflection.

Our Mission

I Am Why aims to increase the individual and collective power of young women and gender-expansive activists, and catalyze a power shift whereby young activists share power with allies and systems to create policies, practices and programs that center self-determination and justice.



Purpose & Theory of Change

I Am Why catalyzes a power shift and influences policy by centering young women and gender-expansive activists using three strategies:

- 1) *A methodology* that is authentic, connecting young activists' narratives to policy and practice;
- 2) *Communications* tools and opportunities that clarify issues, reframe solutions and model shared power; and
- 3) *Movement building* through young activists' direct engagement with systems we aim to change.



Watering the Seeds of Change 

Increasing Power and Envisioning Justice

At *I Am Why*, we often think of our work as watering the seeds of change by increasing the individual and collective power of young activists. We do this through our intergenerational, team-based model, which centers the leadership of young women and gender-expansive activists while providing support as needed from older advisors.



FY 2022 Accomplishments

All of our teams work in different ways to catalyze a power shift and create a vision for justice. Here are some highlights from our teams in FY 2022:

☀️ The Communications Team hosted a *webinar* on the process of creating our art and social justice book, *I Am Why Reclaiming the Lens*; developed an **op-ed project**, through which our young consultants articulate their vision for change; and launched the *I Am Why blog*, which features the authentic voices of our consultants and calls attention to issues and values we care about.

☀️ The Curatorial Team released a *mini-film* about our “Watering the Seeds: Organizing and Creating Paths for Young Women to Lead” exhibit at the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts in March 2021, and is now laying the groundwork for a **future exhibit** in New York City.

☀️ Our Curriculum Team facilitated eight *virtual/in-person workshops and trainings* in FY 2022. This included a four-day workshop series with our **new partner, Progeny** (see feature page, below). In partnership with **National Crittenton**, the team is part of the **New Jersey Core Team** for a Centers for Disease Control project focused on reducing girls’ exposure to sexual violence.

☀️ The young mothers in our Motherhood Support Team are developing a *motherhood manifesto and zine series* centering policies that affect young mothers. The team also provides support to young mothers through **creative writing opportunities, guest speakers, resources and conversation.**

☀️ Our Racial Justice Team developed and hosted a *webinar that explored colorism* and its effect on young women and gender-expansive youth of color.

☀️ The Planning Team has been *busy conducting a full assessment of I Am Why’s FY 2022 activities*, and laying the groundwork for the hiring of *I Am Why’s first-ever co-executive directors.*

☀️ The experts on our Restorative Practice Team hosted *training sessions* for *I Am Why* consultants and staff, facilitated **listening circles** and launched a **book circle.**



Highlight of FY 2022 ✨

A vibrant, abstract collage on a solid blue background. The composition is a dense arrangement of various elements: a large, detailed yellow sunflower with a dark brown center is prominent in the lower center. To its right, a rainbow arches over a small, grey, house-like structure with a yellow roof. A large, white, feathered angel wing extends from the upper left towards the center. A thick, green, translucent ribbon or streamer flows from the upper right, looping around a dark, cylindrical object. Various other elements are scattered throughout, including pink and yellow flowers, a monarch butterfly, a green and yellow butterfly, a small white bird, a green tree stump, a red and white striped object, and several purple, spiky, dandelion-like flowers. The overall style is whimsical and artistic, with a rich color palette.

In FY 2022 *I Am Why's* three strategies—authentic methodology, communications tools and movement building/direct action—came together through our partnership with **Progeny**, a grassroots community-based organization in Wichita, Kansas focused on reimagining the youth legal system and promoting reinvestment into community-based alternatives.

In May 2022, *I Am Why* facilitated a four-day in-person activism workshop at Progeny for seven young women and three staff to build the collective and individual power of Progeny's young women activists. We met with the folks at Progeny for six months before we visited so we could get to know each other and discuss the different policies that impact the women we serve.

Building community allowed us to authentically design and tailor a workshop that would support the young women in Wichita as they reclaim their dominant narrative. The workshop included our core *I Am Why* portrait curriculum and a newly developed zine curriculum.

In June 2022, Progeny partnered with a local Black-owned art gallery to hold a jointly curated Juneteenth exhibition featuring the collaborative portraits and filmed messages developed through the partnership with *I Am Why*.

Consistent with our model, we invited all young women workshop participants to join *I Am Why* as consultants. Five young women have joined us, and with the goal of enabling Progeny to develop and facilitate their own *I Am Why* workshop with young people in their community, we have begun a six-week "train-the-trainers" curriculum.

The new *I Am Why* consultants from Progeny will lead specially tailored workshops for girls and young women at community-based organizations around Kansas, culminating in a book—*I Am Why Reclaiming the Lens: Kansas*—focused on their vision of justice.

"I Am Why was well-prepared, energetic, collaborative, and had a welcoming energy which the participants responded to. We built real community around common goals and visions."

— Progeny staff

"We loved the 'train-the-trainers' model, where I Am Why was there to train our more senior participants who would then do the workshop around our state."

— Progeny staff

"[Our I Am Why workshop facilitator] stepped into her power,... emotional, vigorous, ready to work and look within."

— Progeny staff



Deepening Our Roots



Strengthening Our Organization and Generating Energy for the Future

In FY 2022 *I Am Why* formalized its structure, expanded its funding streams and significantly expanded consultant and external partner engagement. In FY 2023 we will build on this strength and energy by increasing our financial and programmatic commitment to the people of *I Am Why*—our consultants and partners.



Our Story in Numbers

In FY 2022, I Am Why:

Incorporated as a charitable organization in Massachusetts and installed an intergenerational Board of Directors, 100% comprised of People of Color (3 Black women, 1 Pacific Islander and 1 Latinx woman) and with 60% of members under age 35

Hired Alondra Aragon, our first full-time Program Associate, and a young leader under 26

Doubled our foundation funding partners, who now include: Advancing Girls Initiative of the Tides Foundation, Canary Impact Fund, Grantmakers for Girls of Color, IADC Foundation, Ms. Foundation for Women, and Public Welfare Foundation

Partnered with 7 community-based organizations to deliver 10 workshops and trainings

Developed new partner programming in response to 86% of inquiries from community-based organizations

Increased our young consultant engagement by 50%

Doubled our social media presence

In FY 2023 we plan to meet this moment of increased consultant engagement by:

Spending 84% of our annual budget on programming and development and 16% on general operations

Dedicating 90% of I Am Why funds to our people, with 50% of that going to young women consultants and staff

Added 8 young consultants to our Motherhood Support Team

Added 7 young consultants to our Curriculum Team/workshop facilitators



Our Intergenerational Model: Hiring Co-Executive Directors

Core to *I Am Why's* work is intergenerational partnership—centering young leaders while also ensuring support from older advisors. Consistent with this core value we are committed to hiring intergenerational co-executive directors who will work in equal partnership, thereby elevating youth leadership and voice while also benefiting from years of experience.



Growing through Knowledge



I Am Why is a learning organization: We work with intentionality and humility, learning as we go and applying insights to future activities. To us knowledge is power, and we prioritize the learning and growth of our consultants and staff.

Leadership Development Working Group

Our Leadership Development Working Group provides opportunities for collective learning and reflection, as well as concrete skill-building. In FY 2022 the working group hosted sessions exploring working norms and best practices tied to our mentor-mentee model, and launched the first of its substantive trainings for consultants and staff with a resume workshop and policy training series. We also supported our consultants to obtain professional certifications and attend external professional development seminars.

Research and Evaluation Team

To better understand the “how” of our work, and to learn more about our impact, the Research and Evaluation Team conducted a case study of the process of creating our book, *I Am Why Reclaiming the Lens*. To make sure we pair analysis with all our work, we established and are training consultants on grounding theoretical frameworks, and law and policy basics.

Assessment of Activities

As part of our learning efforts, in May 2022 *I Am Why* embarked upon an assessment of the prior year’s activities in an effort to identify the components of our work that are most predictive of success.

An intergenerational team of four *I Am Why* staff and consultants interviewed consultants and partners to identify our challenges as well as the factors most predictive of success in meeting one or more of *I Am Why*’s six core objectives:

Objectives for consultants

- Build self-identity and solidarity
- Validation and recognition of own experience
- Skill building and increasing self and collective power

Objectives for allies and conventional power

Influence policy by creating and communicating a body of work that:

- Is credible
- Demonstrates action while tapping emotion
- Creates an authentic path forward for policymakers

Themes of Success: Internal

We believe that if our projects actively work to incorporate these five components, they are most likely to achieve our six objectives, which in turn will expand the individual and collective power and policy impact of young women and gender-expansive activists in alignment with *I Am Why*’s mission.

I Am Why’s work is most successful when it:

Builds community and reflects a shared purpose—Community-based partnerships build consultants’ leadership within their own communities, affirm and strengthen their skills, and add meaning to *I Am Why*’s larger body of work.

“After the exhibit, I was really empowered to center reclaiming the narrative... It inspired me to lead in that way and I have taken that with me. Having an organization affirm that, external forces affirm that, affirming that in myself—that we are part of this bigger movement of people reclaiming what is truthful for them—those ideas were always there, but I didn’t really grasp it til then.”

— *I Am Why* consultant

Is authentically ours and reflects our individual and collective passions—Authentic passion is energizing and helps us push through when projects are complicated and tough. There is a special sort of pride in seeing one’s idea flourish and become actionable.

“Moms are coming in with a passion for policy change and...this group can be a catalyst for that.”

— *I Am Why* consultant

Is designed in the sweet spot between structure and support—*I Am Why*’s sweet spot is meeting the young consultants where they are and supporting their professional development with a solid yet flexible structure.



"[The work] felt heavy at some parts, but it was impactful to make it through—to move through the process, having help from [other consultants and advisors], to complete the project. It made me feel like I could do so much more."

— *I Am Why* consultant

Is led by the younger consultants and supported by advisors—We work best when the younger consultants lead with their own passion and ideas, with intergenerational support and guidance from advisors in an environment of mutual trust. Young consultants have critical leadership knowledge and skills, and leadership itself can be a path to healing.

"Having [the advisor's] expertise and support... paved the way for us to figure out how we wanted to do it—showed how it can be when elders uplift youth."

— *I Am Why* consultant

Balances the internal organizational growth with the external impact—External project-based work enables consultants to feel they are having a concrete and meaningful impact in communities, and an internal focus on organizational growth, structure and professional development creates space for consultants to be an active part of decision-making, and strengthen their leadership and power.

"I get to use the knowledge I have learned in *I Am Why* in other spaces. I gained a lot [of experience], a chance to practice—and now I can do it anywhere else."

— *I Am Why* consultant

Themes of Success: External

We identified four external themes that speak to the common value *I Am Why* partners find in our work, and demonstrate *I Am Why*'s unique approach to building power and impacting policy.

***I Am Why* builds relationships and trust with partners that strengthen its work and impact**—*I Am Why* prioritizes building trust-based relationships so young people can fully step into their power through our workshop activities, and to ensure that we fully understand what our partners hope to gain from the partnership.

"The collaboration was excellent. We took the time to develop our relationship...so we knew *I Am Why* and they knew us, so when the facilitators arrived we had a foundation and could hit the ground running."

— *I Am Why* partner

***I Am Why*'s activities adeptly blend creativity and analysis**—*I Am Why*'s model centers art and writing as a means of expressing oneself and as a mechanism for analysis and activism. Workshop participants come to see their personal stories as journeys that connect them with others and vest them with expertise in envisioning justice.

"*I Am Why* uses the perfect blend of analysis and creativity, which is a powerful strategy."

— *I Am Why* partner

***I Am Why* reaches women and gender-expansive young people at a critical transitional stage**—Our focus on young people between the ages of 17 and 26 is filling a gap, providing a much-needed bridge for young people at a transitional stage to move into their power and grow in their professional lives, while also building collective power among a growing cohort of workshop facilitators.

"[*I Am Why*'s work with the] young adult population is critical; it is important to work with them as they are in transition."

— *I Am Why* partner

***I Am Why* brings a unique youth perspective to spaces and issues where youth voice is not typically prioritized**—The young consultants of *I Am Why* bring powerful personal experiences with injustice to bear on discussions around what change is needed and how to manifest that vision. Our young consultants see gaps that others may not, suggest creative solutions, and demonstrate the power and wisdom in youth voice.

"The youth voice, youth perspective from *I Am Why* is really great. ... *I Am Why* has a good perspective on youth feeling seen and heard."

— *I Am Why* partner



A vibrant, abstract collage on a bright orange background. The composition features a central figure with a raised arm, surrounded by various elements: a large blue ribbon, a string of pink and yellow flowers, a white wing, several clock faces, a butterfly, a hand with a red and blue gradient, a large yellow sunflower, a rainbow, and various other floral and geometric shapes. The overall style is highly detailed and colorful.

3. It is difficult to find the right balance between structure and support—*I Am Why* aims to have an organizational structure in which all consultants are vested with power, voice and independence. However, there is a wide range of experience and skill sets among our consultants; responding to these variable needs, both at an individual and organizational level, requires a high level of agility, which is especially challenging with limited staffing.

Conclusion: Deepening Our Roots
& Continuing to Grow 🌱

The Future for *I Am Why*

As we reflect on FY 2022, we are looking ahead to FY 2023 with excitement. The themes of success and challenges we have identified through our assessment have provided *I Am Why* with critical learnings that will inform our operational and organizational planning moving forward.

We expect our growth to continue as we nurture the seeds we've planted, further deepen our organizational roots and apply our learnings.

We hope to expand our consultant network to the southwest and south through new partnerships and workshops, exhibit our artwork and writing in new areas of the country, solidify our organizational longevity through new leadership and bring our voices to bear on policies and practices.





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