



A PODCAST WITH RUSTY STAHL | S7 EP26

Thriving Wages for Community Organizers

WITH

Kara Park &
Gaby Hernandez
All Due Respect & Órale



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INTRO

Welcome to the Fund the People podcast. I'm your host, Rusty Stahl. I'm president and CEO of Fund The People where our mission is to maximize investment in America's nonprofit workforce. We give funders and nonprofits cutting edge ideas, research and tools to help drive equity effectiveness and endurance in the social sector. So let's start the show.

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RUSTY

Hi, folks. Welcome to your Fund the People podcast, season seven, episode 26. I hope you're keeping your tank full, taking care of yourself and taking care of one another. Today you'll hear the story of a group of nonprofit leaders and organizations that have collectively committed to improving standards for working conditions and wages for their employees and themselves, in particular the community organizers on their teams. This group of folks is now advocating with their funders to provide the resources or help provide those resources needed to make these better working conditions a reality.

This episode is a continuation of our occasional series, following up on our California Talent Justice Summit, where our friends at All Due Respect, presented a pre-conference session on their work in California. This is the second time we've had on All Due Respect as guests on the show, we'll link to the previous episode -which had different people as guests from All Due Respect- in the show notes.

Our podcast publishes every Wednesday morning while we are in season, so be sure to subscribe and watch your podcast feed on Wednesday mornings. Every other episode we talk

about how to Defend Nonprofits and Defend Democracy. So be sure to check out next week's episode for news, analysis on policy and the relationship between government and nonprofits.

Our guests today are Kara Park, from All Due Respect and Gaby Hernandez from ÓRALE. All Due Respect is a national effort to improve labor standards for community organizers in the United States. And ÓRALE is an immigrant rights nonprofit in Southern California. Welcome to the show, Kara and Gaby.

00:02:26:13

KARA

Thanks for having us.

00:02:28:01

RUSTY

Absolutely, thank you for being here.

00:02:31:03

GABY

Excited to be here with you all.

00:02:33:01

RUSTY

We're really, really excited to feature your important work. So, Kara, why don't you get us started by introducing yourself and All Due Respect?

00:02:42:23

KARA

Yeah, sounds great. Thanks again for having us on the show. I'm Kara Park, I use she/her pronouns and I'm currently one of two program directors at All Due Respect. I'm also a former organizer who, you know, very nearly burned out several times and watched a lot of the folks that I came up organizing with burn out of the movement or have to take other jobs because they were wanting to start a family or taking care of other loved ones. So that really is what led me to All Due Respect.

And we are a national effort really focused on one thing only: improving working conditions for community organizers, because we believe organizers are the foundation and future of our movement, and there's no winning without them. So we do our work through projects that really marry research with action and implementation, trying things out in partnership with organizers, with organizational directors, and with funders, because we believe that all three roles really have a unique stake and perspective in creating solutions and creating sustainable working conditions that really improve the lives of organizers and the organizations that they work for.

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RUSTY

All right. I'm glad you found All Due Respect and brought all that organizing experience, your own and what you saw other people go through, to this important work. Gaby, why don't you introduce yourself and your organization, please?

00:04:08:07

GABY

Hi, folks. My name is Gaby Hernandez, my pronouns are she/her/ella and I serve as executive director for ÓRALE. And ÓRALE stands for Organizing Rooted in Abolition, Liberation and Empowerment and that's what we're about. ÓRALE is building and sustaining a thriving immigrant led movement to end the criminalization of immigrants and secure both protections and opportunities that allow our immigrant communities to thrive.

And also, you know, how I landed as the executive director, because I came from organizing and that's my background. I actually didn't even envision to be an executive director, but it's really, the time called for it and there was no one else, and I had to step into the role. But I think I always bring that organizing perspective into the work that I do and how I lead the organization.

And so I'm excited to be here and to be part of this conversation. We've been working with All Due Respect for I think it's going to be about two years now since we first met, and this is something that's important to us, especially as we know that organizers are like the heart of the movement. So again, excited to be part of this conversation.

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RUSTY

Thank you, Gaby, and thanks for your work and the way you stepped up into that role. For those listening who may not be super familiar with what community organizing is or what community organizers do, Kara or Gaby, would you just share with us some key elements of what makes for a community organizing or a community organizer versus other kinds of nonprofit work?

00:05:33:21

KARA

Yeah, happy to kind of get us started and then, Gaby, feel free to share your own ÓRALE flavor. I think across our work, we really talk about community organizers as the folks who are building relationships directly with community, you know, maintaining those relationships and supporting those folks to feel empowered, to really identify and create solutions to the problems affecting them and really bringing those folks together to create campaigns and win campaigns.

And so a lot of their work looks like doing one on ones with folks, you know, holding meetings, bringing people together, moving people through campaign actions, debriefing, bringing the organization along. And, of course, that looks differently depending on the type of organizing that folks are doing: immigrant justice work, environmental organizing. But a lot of the actions that they do are very similar.

00:06:24:22

GABY

Yeah, I would just add, I would ask folks, do they enjoy their weekends and eight hour days? Organizers made that happen. You know, that's really a common effort. All the things that we now take as part of our daily lives, it was fought by organizers coming together, joining forces and winning policies that better the lives of folks. And so for ÓRALE our work is rooted in working with undocumented folks and immigrants, and so maybe that's an example that people would understand.

00:06:52:08

RUSTY

Thank you very much. Yeah, good to define terms there at the beginning. So, Kara, in November of it's hard to believe it's been this long, but 2022, we're in season seven now of this show but on season three, episode eight of this podcast we had on Kinzie Mabone and Kevin Simowitz, both of whom were then on staff at All Due Respect, and they shared findings from the, I believe is the initial national research that All Due Respect did as an organization. And so I thought we could start maybe with, if you could briefly remind folks who may not remember that episode from three years ago, what that study was and what it found.

00:07:35:06

KARA

So this was kind of the initial research that helped form All Due Respect and direct to our work and was really rooted in interviews and conversations and surveys that we did with over 200 organizers, organizational directors and funders really looking to understand what is the current state of organizing jobs and how are those conditions affecting organizers and the movements that they're a part of?

What we found, probably not surprising, organizers, nine out of ten of them said that they had experienced burnout and actually, three in four of them have said they've thought about leaving the field. So really what we saw was a movement out of alignment, that organizers were struggling to remain in their jobs, even if they wanted to in their heart was in the work, that we heard from a lot of organizational leaders that they were experiencing challenges, finding and recruiting organizers, building their bench, and then keeping them in the work, and that they really wanted to do better by their teams but didn't necessarily have the resources to do so.

And then we heard from funders that they were increasingly recognizing their relationship to the working conditions and the pay and salary and benefits of the staff of the organizations that they were supporting, but weren't necessarily sure where to start addressing that with their grantees.

So you can find the full report on our website. It did happen, as you said a few years ago. The research period was actually fall of 2020 through 2021. So like deep in the beginnings of the pandemic and unfortunately, a lot of the findings probably still resonate with folks. But we also hope that in some ways that's validating to, you know, see kind of what folks are experiencing

being reflected on the page and kind of offering some directions and next steps around what we can do about that as a movement and as an ecosystem.

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RUSTY

Yeah, I think you're probably right that those findings won't be irrelevant, just because they were in the pandemic. We've been arguing that the stressors and the crises have been piling up one on top of the other from the preexisting conditions of the chronic underinvestment in the nonprofit workforce to our current batch of crises that have been coming fast and furious over at least the last decade, including the pandemic.

So, you know, some of our research too, like our talent justice study was done 2018-2019, but it all still feels very, very relevant. Okay, Well, thanks for that. I definitely recommend folks look at that study and we'll put a link to it in the show notes as well. Do you just want to shout out the All Due Respect web address so people can find it now if they want to check it out?

00:10:15:01 - 00:10:19:00

KARA

Yeah, sure it is allduerespectproject.org.

00:10:19:02

RUSTY

Okay. Kara, so you all shifted from that initial kind of national study to this set of place based practical pilot efforts. Could you give us a quick rundown of what those pilots are about and where they've taken place?

00:10:34:24

KARA

Yeah. So based on this national landscape, we really wanted to move into identifying and testing some interventions. And so to do so, really recognized that we need to work with organizations and funders and organizers that are in relationships. So it doesn't have to be about a region or a place, but some ecosystem where there are already existing relationships and they can kind of test and move things together.

So out of that, we began two projects in California. One is in Southern California, which we'll talk about quite a bit more later in the conversation. And we also have a project in the Bay Area that initially focused on retaining and recruiting youth organizers and has really moved to focus on the full lifecycle of any organizer, starting with recruitment, moving to what successful onboarding looks like, investing in their professional development, their management, and really thinking about what it looks like to invest in them doing their jobs well in the short term as well as retaining them in the long term.

And then our third project that has really taken shape over the past year or so, we've done a lot of exciting work in New York City and actually just recently released a new resource called

Compensation and Beyond, on what organizers need to do to really do their best work and stay in the field. So I'll share a link to that resource as well.

And then broadly, as I mentioned, we are just interested in experimenting, testing interventions, working with specific organizing ecosystems. So we're continuing to plan for some potential work that might be taking shape in Illinois, in the state of Oregon, in North Carolina, and with immigration organizers nationally. So we have some emerging projects and are always excited about new opportunities there as well.

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RUSTY

Great. So in this episode, we're going to focus on the Southern California pilot. Can you give us an overview, Kara, of the focus of this pilot, the timeline and the process?

00:12:36:12

KARA

Yeah. So our work in Southern California really grew out of initial conversations with organizations and their funders, just recognizing challenges around organizer retention, a lot of issues of burnout cropping up. And so we did an initial set of interviews with some organizational leaders and funders in early 2023. And what kind of became clear through those conversations is just that compensation and issues around the rising cost of living kept rising to the top, both because rapidly rising cost of living as well as long term underinvestment in the sector.

So from those initial conversations, we really co-created a project with the support of the Weingart Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation and Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr Fund and the California Community Foundation, which enabled us to bring together a cohort of 20 organizations, really just focused on addressing what do organizers need in Southern California to do their jobs well, to remain in their jobs and to really, you know, thrive in their role.

We also did a set of organizer focus groups and a compensation study, that I think we'll dive into in a little bit, that really helped inform that effort. And what emerged from that brought together the ingredients of organizer experience, the data that we had from the organizer compensation study and what organizational leaders had been experiencing and reflecting on on their own. And what came out of that was a set of labor standards, really focused on raising the wage floor on transparent pay scales and budgets, around benefits and around time off and workloads.

And again, these are really meant to be aspirational, right? The organizations who created them recognize we're not currently meeting these, but this is what we believe organizers need. And so we're making a shared commitment to move in that direction and to work to get there. I'll also just note that obviously every time we talk about issues like the rising cost of living, shredded social safety net, putting all the work on individual organizations to solve those issues for their employees is not a long term solution. We know that's not tenable, that we need answers like affordable housing, universal health care, paid leave programs, all of the systemic issues that

we're fighting for. Also, the organizers that are fighting for that future deserve more than to be treated as a disposable labor force, underpaid and overworked. And so when we are able to, we want to be able to do better by them.

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RUSTY

That's great. And I love that it's like, let's put things in place now and also have our aspirational goals that we want to move toward. So it's practical and immediate, but also longer term thinking. I think that's totally what we need and then agree with you, the onus cannot and should not just be on individual nonprofits or the people who are leading them to fix this problem because it's system wide, multiple systems, really.

That's one of the reasons that Fund the People has been trying to influence the funding community because we need them to shift what the strings and incentives are that are attached to the funding so that organizations have the capital or have the money and the incentives to be able to treat their staff better. We're just so aligned, with All Due Respect on this, that it's really exciting to hear about this particular pilot.

So, Gaby, how did you and your organization get involved with this pilot? Did they just land in your lap in some way, or were there pre existing relationships with your partners or All Due Respect that led to your involvement?

00:16:15:07

GABY

So I think for us, given my background and starting as an organizer, I think I realized that it's not like I haven't done that job. So I know that it requires a lot and I know it's the heart of this work. And I think what you mentioned just earlier is so on point, right. That this is like an ecosystem, this is a complex, right, the nonprofit industry is a complex. And so I think understanding that is so key.

We had a few folks burn out now during the first Trump administration and so I think that was the first wake up call, right? And then after that, we grew so fast that I think when that happened, we started recognizing that maybe our folks were not feeling seen and heard, right? And so we actually had transitioned from a couple of organizers that left with a lot of feedback. I say that, and I say it in a transparent way because it's the reality, right? Like, we recognize that we live under this complex and it became really clear that specifically organizers were not feeling compensated well, were not feeling seen and that came with this bigger ecosystem that exists, right.

But I think we had to break it down and say, like, it's not just us as an organization and yes, as an organization individually, we can always do better and we should be reflecting on that. And also, let's look at this bigger picture that is not individually. I think for so long when you came into this work, you kind of accepted that it's going to be not a well-paying job, but I do it for passion and for wanting to do something to better this world and to help our communities.

But why, why does that have to be the norm? Why do we have to accept that these jobs will not be well paid when we're actually transforming the world? Like that just, you know, it doesn't really make sense when we talk about and we realize that the things that we have and, you know, I jokingly ask earlier, like, do you enjoy your weekend? But it's the reality, these are, the organizers, the work, this is what makes things transform and move forward. So how can we not recognize that?

I think about organizers a lot like I think about teachers, you know, we don't give the resources that they need and we expect them to do a lot. You know, I came to this work from that perspective of having experienced this myself and also then being in leadership and also hearing it from our organizers like it hasn't changed. And so that really got us thinking in a self-reflective mode and really recognizing that, like there's some self-reflection that we have to do and also we're not alone. So let's figure out who else is doing this.

To be completely honest I think it was an invite that we got, it was an email that I got that I was like, this is really interesting is just about what we're talking about and how we want to improve as an organization. And we went to a meeting and really I came to that meeting with like, let me see what this is about, let me see who is part of this phase. Because, you know, oftentimes in the nonprofit industrial complex, you join spaces and you're like, well, these are just meetings for the sake of meetings and there's no real purpose.

So, I came with that in mind and I was like, let me explore this space because I think it's needed. And, you know, I was surprised by the fact that we actually had relationships with a lot of the organizations there already. So I think that made the conversation easier because we had maybe, you know, off the record from this process, we had already maybe talked about the things that we were struggling with as nonprofits. Because we have to talk to each other and we're not the only ones going through it as well, especially when we see folks burning out, it's the system that we have to recognize

And especially if we're fighting to make things better. We have to recognize that even internally it's okay to do things better. And so we came with that mindset and, you know, that's why we got involved and I think the more the process progressed, the more we realized this is a good space to be in community with others, to share. So just to give you an example, we were looking to do a compensation study on our own as an organization, but I was having a hard time finding a consultant that was, you know, a person of color and someone that understood this kind of work, which is like justice and immigration and and liberation. And I didn't find someone and so I came into the space and actually asked the group and the group provided recommendations of like, I work with this organization and, you know, here it is and so now we have that right. And so it's about being in community and that's what happens in organizing. So, I hope that answers your question.

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RUSTY

Yeah, there's so much stuff you said about, you know, why and how you got involved and your organization got involved and really got me thinking that so many times there's so much pressure we put on ourselves, inside our organizations, to practice what we preach, to live up to the values that we want companies or the government or the outside world to live up to. I think sometimes we get into that well, we need to practice it too, and so we need to be as pure and exemplary as possible if we're going to then turn to the outer world and say, this is what you should do.

And sometimes it's just unrealistic to have that expectation in isolation from the rest of the system and in isolation from the resources it would take to practice what we preach completely and live up to the values that we all want to live up to. It makes so much sense to do it in community with other organizations and in an ecosystem and with support of a group like All Due Respect. Instead of just getting into like, how do I do this here just with my team. I just think it can be very frustrating for everyone involved.

And I think we've seen organizations kind of like implode from that tension between "management" and "the rest of the employees", because everyone wants to practice what we preach but management has to figure out how to find the time and the resources, the money to make that happen. So it's just really great to hear that this space helped you have a productive and supportive process to try to figure those things out. That's fantastic.

So I was just really impressed as you all sent me materials. I saw that the pilot had these multiple stages and products, written products, a study of compensation among organizers in the region, which, you know, has already been referred to, and that has ten findings. And we're going to talk about them in sort of two clusters of findings.

But there's also the set of labor standards, written standards, to improve compensation. And then most recently, this open letter to funders and the funding community. And I was curious, did you all set out to produce these three particular documents and resources, or did it happen really in response to the process and to the conversations among the participating organizations?

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GABY

Yeah, I think it was an organic conversation because I think we know when we think about the issue, we're like, okay, what's the common denominator here, right? Like, how do we get this to the finish line? How do we as an organization accomplish this? And the number one thing that we all came back to is funding. Like, we cannot do any of this if we don't have the funding.

I think then we talked about the relationships, you know, the power relationships that exist when you're in funding relationships. And I think it got us thinking too, we got to make sure that they know and that they know that we are on the same page as a collective and that we're asking for those, right? Because otherwise it becomes like a silo or like that organization asked for those, that organization over there, but it's really as a movement that we're saying we're coming

together and letting you know that these are the things that we need in order to move this work forward, right?

Like, we can't continue to pretend that we're going to solve the world with \$30,000. Like that's just not going to happen, right? Because we're doing a disservice to us, our community and our staff, which are also part of our community as well. So like, we can't, we can't have those kinds of dynamics. So I think from the bigger group we got smaller and we were a smaller group of focus, I think it was six organizations if I'm counting right, that came together to brainstorm further around this implementation and how we individually and collectively kind of moved this process forward and the needle.

And so I think what came out of that organically was like, we have to do an open letter so that they know this is not in silo, this is not just one organization, but as a collective that is coming together and uplifting, uplifting the things that we have already known but now we need to make sure that they understand and see it. So I think that's kind of how I saw it but , Kara, I know that you were part of the other conversation. So happy to pass it to you.

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KARA

What I would just add is that I think the initial seeds of what this project became really started from grantees and funders just saying we need data around what organizers are making, like we maybe know what we're doing or we've kind of had off the record conversations with some partners, but we want to know both what the market rate is and what it should be, and ideally could be, across the ecosystem.

So the initial vision was just like, maybe we do a compensation study. And then of course, as we got involved and as more partners came to the table, we really wanted to move beyond just looking at what is the current state for organizers and really talk about what are organizations committing to do, what are the standards that they want to live up to and work towards? And then as Gaby said, you know, the open letter piece is really part of bringing funders into the conversation and talking about each of us has a stake in making these standards real and let's have an ongoing conversation around what it looks like to invest in organizers and organizing in this moment.

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GABY

Yeah, I just wanted to add that, like when we, this study, like, no one was surprised by it, you know what I mean? Like as organizers or folks in this work, no one was like, Oh my God, there's no way, right? Like, we were all like, yeah, confirming what we already knew. It was one of those things that you needed to have it on paper, right? Because I think we don't put emphasis on that, we need to make it a tangible reality.

Like this is what we have experienced and we need to document it and not only document it, but go beyond. And I think that's what we're trying to do. Like, how do we go beyond just what we

already know and in telling the world what we already know, but how do we change those conditions? And I think that also speaks from the organizing background, like we wanted action, it's not just like that's a pretty study. Yes, we know that. And it's really actually pretty bad, how do we make it better and then, what do we need to make that better? And that's how this all came about.

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RUSTY

Yeah, it's obviously so important to bring funders into the conversation. I think All Due Respect has done that very well since the beginning. I remember being on some funder briefing kind of webinar thing for the initial study, the national study you all did, and it really was about creating a conversation among the funders who already support social justice groups, organizing work, but trying to help them think about how to do it better by supporting organizers and their organizations to create better jobs for organizers.

So, that makes a lot of sense, and I think it would be worth it if we have time on this interview or another conversation to talk about how the funders have responded, what questions they have, what, if any, pushback, because I certainly, in my time at Fund the People, have seen both that funders have internal challenges, they have mindset challenges, they have pushback on things when we try to talk to them about investing in grantee staff.

So, in the compensation study, there's a lot of findings, there are ten findings. I read it as two broad clusters. Kara, I wonder if you could just pull out some highlights for you from the findings, either high level, what you think the findings tell us or some of the specific findings you want to pull out?

00:27:46:07

KARA

Yeah, definitely. I mean, I think as Gaby mentioned, like no one was surprised by the biggest take away of just wages are not keeping pace with the rising cost of living. So I think once we dug into it, what was really interesting was a couple other kinds of further details in the data, one of which being we asked directors not just what they were currently paying their organizers, but what they wish they could pay. And the answer was on average, \$8,000 higher. So on average, organizers were making \$57,000. The average answer of what folks wished they could pay was 65, which really told us again, unsurprisingly, that directors want to do right by their teams. They know the challenges that organizers are facing and they don't necessarily always have the resources to do so.

We also found that across different budget sizes, the average salary for organizers was pretty similar. So organizations that were receiving much larger grants were not necessarily using them to raise salaries. So actually, you know, I think we talk a lot about the importance of multiyear general operating funding, I don't want to take away from that at all. And what this finding told us is that sometimes it is important to actually be explicit about: you can use it for salaries, for benefits, that it may be a larger amount of money and that doesn't necessarily

mean there also have to be more program outcomes or additional programming. That actually the funding can go to some of those internal costs. Recognizing that even with general operating money, there's just years of these kinds of baked in expectations around keeping overhead low. around higher outcomes. So just kind of making that explicit in conversations between grantees and funders.

And then one last point I would just make that I think we continue to talk about and think through is that when we looked at years of experience in organizer pay, what we saw is that there was a cliff about five years out where organizers kind of hit a plateau and weren't necessarily making more money the longer they stayed in their jobs. So for anyone kind of needing a larger salary, maybe they're starting a family, supporting other family members, wanting to buy a home, there's actually a disincentive to remain in organizing, even if that's where their heart is, even if they spent years kind of building up the experience and knowledge of how to organize. So that is something we continue to talk about.

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RUSTY

Yeah, it's frustrating, but as you said, most of the findings are not surprising. But I think those couple of points you offered are counterintuitive, especially to funders in particular, I think. So, you know, a lot of funders now want to be trust based, and they think that means not getting into the weeds or being explicit about what money should be used for or not even asking about the pay or benefits or burnout among staff.

And so I think there's a kind of, from what I've seen, actually executive directors and organizers would love to have those conversations if they felt funders were doing it from a place of support rather than a punitive place. If there was trust established, then we could talk about those things, especially if funders were willing to respond to the challenges and not just kind of hear them and move on.

So I'm really glad you brought that up, there's so much more in this study. The second cluster of findings focuses on the impact of wages on different stakeholders in the field. Would you share some key points from the second cluster findings six through ten, I believe.

00:31:22:12

KARA

You know, we did this compensation study really as a snapshot, a point in time snapshot of what organizers are experiencing across the ecosystem. And so when we looked at that data, we also really wanted to pull out: are there disparities happening? Are there sort of ways that we can disaggregate this data to point to broader trends? And so we did find that, for instance, black organizers are less likely to hold organizing leadership positions, that there was a gender pay gap in terms of higher base pay for men and women.

And so a lot of the things that we've sort of talked about is just recognizing, yes, these standards are aiming to improve the working conditions of all organizers. We also know that bipoc

organizers, like queer and trans organizers, undocumented organizers, are often the ones bearing the brunt of poor working conditions, or that they have fewer support systems to lean on outside of work.

And so even if individual organizations like, they may just employ one or two organizers and so are thinking about what their specific organizers need, but we also hope that this provides a look at what the overall Southern California landscape is experiencing, and especially as funders and intermediaries and others are thinking about how do we invest in this ecosystem equitably, that these are findings that really help shape some of those conversations and decisions that they're making.

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RUSTY

Yeah, as we spent last year focused on California and doing the convenings that we did, the cost of living, the cost of housing in particular, and the cost of doing business as an employer, I think were all very top of mind came immediately to the surface of the conversations across the state Northern California, Southern California.

You know, the cost of living in the big cities, people moving out, but still working in those cities and being from those communities that they're organizing or serving. And the strain and the financial cost of commuting on people and their families and the organizations. It's all there and in the extreme in California, but it's everywhere, also across the country, like this is happening especially as we've had this inflation.

Let's turn to the labor standards that you all kind of co-created during this process. Gaby, do you want to share any things that stood out for you both, either in the process of creating the standards or in the written standards themselves? And we have sort of two columns for each thing. We've got the aspirational standards and then we've got what's called the sustaining standards, which are more like this is what we want to do now versus what we aspire to do.

00:34:03:18

GABY

So I think for us, when we started the process and found this like we were really pleasantly surprised and happy that we're at the sustaining part of it all. But then also we got to realize that a lot of these things are, you don't need to wait for the funding, like you can be creative around it. And I think the reason why we're already at sustaining is because, as I mentioned earlier, I think folks, organizers transitioning now and giving us feedback already got us thinking about what are the ways that we can improve.

And so for folks listening to this, I would just encourage you all to think about like, don't wait for a space like this, like how you start thinking around, like, where are you at right now? And no shame. Like, no shame literally, because I feel like it could be really shameful to be like, Oh, I'm not even at sustaining. But I think it is important to understand that we are operating under this complex that it's functioning in that way, right? They want to give us scraps so that we could be

doing this right, not paying our folks right and then burning out and not necessarily winning the liberation that we all need.

So I think it's all set up as design and so what I'll say is that, right? No shame if you're not even at sustaining, but how can you get the conversation started so that you can get to hopefully the aspirational. Because ultimately we will all win if we get to the aspirational. Because if our folks are a resource, like the movement will be a resource, right? So I'll say that for that question.

00:35:20:17

RUSTY

Thank you. And just to understand your story better, did you feel like ÓRALE started, like when you first created, when the standards were done, okay, we're looking at it: here's aspirational, here's the low hanging fruit, if you will. Did you go, Oh, we're already at sustaining on all these fronts?

00:35:38:10

GABY

We were at most of the sustainable standards. And I think since we've been part of this process, I think for a lot of them we're hitting the aspirational and I think that's the goal, you get there. And then you also know that it's not just your fault alone if you are not at the aspirational yet, or even at the sustaining because it's a complex that we're operating under. So that was kind of my message: It's bigger than all of us, but we can all start doing the reflection now to look at this, because ultimately, if folks are aspirational, the movement will be resourced.

00:36:10:14

RUSTY

Right. So, do you think having the written standards to look at and compare where your org was then and okay, here's where we want to go, just having it in writing to to reflect on, did that help you actually move the organization toward those aspirational aims?

00:36:29:24

GABY

I think having the aspirational would be a collective kind of effort that it was like, it's not just us as ÓRALE saying we're going to get here, but aspirationally we all as a collective want to get there. I think it was motivational like for us to be able to get to that place. And I don't want to by no means pretend that we're perfect because we're not, right? I think we're a work in progress. But I think the point is that we want to get to the aspirational for all the standards, and I think that should be the goal for all of us.

00:36:58:08

RUSTY

And this idea that you could work at one and then go work at another and you'd be able to know what the basic work standard would be no matter which of these orgs you worked at, you kind of have this as a benchmark.

00:37:12:04

GABY

Right, you have it as a benchmark. And also like you don't have to do it all at once. That will be very overwhelming. But at least you can create a plan, right? And then now you have goals or end goals where you want to be at, and so you can create a plan to get you there. You can create a plan to get you to sustaining if you're not there, and then create a plan to get you to aspirational.

And it's not going to happen overnight. I think that's also important to mention, I think it is going to be over the course of years and that's what we're here because I think we need all of us to be on the same page, including funders. This is going to be really hard for folks to get to aspirational if the funding ecosystem operates the same way of like I give you this money for this program, not taking into consideration that it takes so much of our labor to be able to get that accomplished, right?

Like, I think we need to have those honest conversations with funders and say, I cannot pretend that I'm going to be able to do that with this amount of money. And it's having those honest conversations to be like, it's okay to say no, especially if you don't think you have the capacity for it. Because I think in this complex, we oftentimes do that, because we want to meet our folks where they are, because we do want to provide the support that they need. But then at what expense, right.

I think we need to have that into consideration. We don't want to take more money to create more work then it kind of defeats the purpose. We're saying give us more funding so that we can sustain what we currently have and make it a resource movement and not something that continues to burn our people out.

00:38:33:23

RUSTY

Amen. And listening to research on this podcast from our guests over the years, I've learned that our sector, our workforce is underpaid and underinvested in by somewhere in the 30 to 40% below "market rate". You know, doing the same job with the same requirements and the same skill levels as other industries, whether it's for profit or government jobs. So it makes sense that we need 30 to 40% more money to just do really what we already are doing and pay people a decent wage that they deserve. So that tracks to me what you're saying.

I'm curious, has your board gotten involved, has this changed the budget as you think about forecasting in your fundraising goals? Like as you're like, okay, we need to meet these standards, this is what it might cost or this is what we want to layer in this year, this new benefit. At a practical level, and we didn't plan this so I don't mean to put you on the spot, but how have you engaged your board and your team in thinking about how you reach these aspirational standards?

00:39:42:07

GABY

I'm so glad that you're asking that question because I think we haven't talked about the teams and they're like key to all of this, right? And I think for us, just recognizing that people want to be part of the decision making and that all these ideals and actually a lot of the sustaining standards is like, let's move away from white supremacy, like, that's really what it is, right? Let's move away from that and recognize that as folks in this work, we need way, way more than we're being offered.

This definitely changed our approach to the budgeting. One thing that we had to include and it's not like a negotiable is wellness, staff wellness. So that's part of our budget. Obviously, we had to start somewhere, so we had to get like a particular grant that helped us dedicate, you know, specific funding for wellness. And wellness, the team got to decide what that meant, how they wanted to use those funds. And so we created a space where not only do we have it as a budget item, but our folks in our team get to decide how the money is used, right? Because who else better than them to figure out how can we feel compensated in this wellness realm of things.

And so like different things that we've done is like people wanted to do a trip, so we did a trip. You want to go to a spa, like things that we can't have access to because of this, you know, high wages that we wanted to have access to, right? And so the team got to decide what that looked like for each of them and as a collective. And I think that's something that everyone can do. And it's not easy, right? But I think it also provides an example to the team about this is the work that it takes to do a collective decision making and to do a budget that feels right for everyone, right?

So I think it also provides the hands-on experience instead of just thinking leadership decides it all, no, like it doesn't have to be that way. And how can we decentralize where the decision making happens when it comes to wellness and then I think we've practiced that, right? So I think there's tangible things that you can do.

And then with our funders it is just like not selling us short is really what it is really, like where we're thinking about in order to do this work I cannot do that with the amount of money that you're proposing. So like having those real conversations and I think just knowing your team's value in the work that you're doing. I think that's the one thing that I want to put an emphasis on, because the power dynamic relationship exists with funders, that some folks don't feel comfortable to but you're doing a disservice if we don't see that, right? Because when you take in a grant that you can't necessarily fulfill, because it's unrealistic, then that's what creates all this tension, say, like the workload, having to work more. And so it leads to it.

So I would just ask you to think about, you know, for the folks here that are listening that you think about that from the beginning as you're taking those grants, that you don't chase the money, but you actually do it, that you get the support that you need at the value that you deserve.

00:42:28:14

RUSTY

That's great, actually I think you just summarized everything. That makes so much sense, that mindset shift of not chasing the money, but asking for planning, for raising for the value and what is needed and deserved. And so that brings us really to this open letter to funders that I think is maybe part of that process of having this collective voice on these issues to the funding community. And there's, I imagine, overlapping funders among the groups or potentially overlapping funders. But, Kara, do you want to weigh in on this funder letter, like how it came about quickly and like any key points about how you're using it or what's the key message from the letter?

00:43:16:00

KARA

Sure. I mean, I think it's important to say this is not like a one time communication or conversation like these organization and funders have been in conversation throughout this project. And especially in this political moment it felt really important, I think, to come together and say, what does it actually mean to invest in organizing? Like if we keep saying, how do we win? How do we get through this political moment? And the answer is organizing. What does that look like for these organizations and their teams?

And so it was a chance to really come together and say, we support these standards, we want to get to the point of meeting these standards and to do that, we really need funders to show up and be in partnership with us. And that can look like increasing grant sizes, it can look like having those transparent conversations around what the organizations need right now, it can look like maybe one time special grants to kind of build some of the capacity to actually implement these standards. And it can look like organizing other funders and really bringing them to the table into the conversation as well.

00:44:18:14

RUSTY

Organizing funders and asking funders to organize each other. It's a good point.

00:44:23:19

GABY

Rusty, I did want to add something based on the previous question that you asked around the board as well. I think that can be a tricky scenario, which I don't know why, but it is sometimes, right? So I think that which is for the EDs Co-EDs, leadership, that is, you know, hoping to bring this to the board is like it's a nonnegotiable.

Like if we want to continue this work, we've got to take care of our people. So I think if you come with the approach, it's not a question because you can't convince people of the reality of that. It's more like in order for us to continue this work, we have to look into this, in order to retain and sustain our folks and to continue the work. So just an invitation for folks that are thinking about how do we approach is. it's you have to come with the mindset that if we don't do this now, your

people are going to burn out. It's a matter of time, not if it's going to happen, it's just when it will happen if things don't change.

00:45:13:07

RUSTY

You know, we're talking about wages and benefits, but also the wellness, because one of the themes on this show over time has been, you know, we could pay people better, but they could still burn out if the work is overwhelming. And so how do you kind of balance issues of organizational culture and workload and having enough staff to do what you're trying to do and compensate people with good solid wages and benefits and professional development?

We need both. Like one doesn't substitute for the other. So the whole funder conversation in the last couple of years as they started realizing burnout was a major issue in nonprofits, was a focus on wellbeing and wellness, but not on wages and benefits and professional development. And so one feels kind of shallow and empty without the other. Like we kind of need both, right?

00:46:10:01

GABY

That's kind of been my biggest kind of takeaway is that you need both right? And talking to the team, it's like, look, you can pay me all you want, you can give me the certificate recognizing me, but if I'm not happy coming to this job, I'm not going to do it. And I think that's the reality. How do we create, and it's just not just leadership, and it's not just me, is it as a collective, how do we create the conditions so that we can have a trust based kind of relationship and just be in communication, you know.

And even as you were mentioning workloads, it's just maintaining communication at all fronts, right? Like with the funders of like this is a reality of what we can do. And with their team, like, can we actually even do this because ultimately who does the majority of the work? So I think it's having just those conversations and just having an open dialog around the things that, you know, that need to be taken into consideration as you take in more funding, as you develop new work, like how do you do it without burning yourself out?

And I think for us we made it intentional to think about time off, right? And so, we know that our work is never, there's never a slow moment, like never, right? But, how do we create intentional break time so that we can recharge, because we're not robots, right? We're human beings, we're really connected to the missions that we work in, right? It's not a corporate job, right where you can just clock out and be like bye! No, this for a lot of us, this is our lives and sometimes we don't get to clock out when we leave, right? Like it's part of our daily.

And so it's taking all of that into consideration as you develop conversations around this, is like having all those things as realities, as acknowledgments, to move the conversation kind of forward. And it's both, it has to have both.

00:47:43:12

RUSTY

And especially as the nonprofit sector in general tries to get more people with lived experience of the problems that they're trying to solve, the more primary and secondary trauma and experience is coming into that workplace, and the more we need that opportunity to take the break and take care of our families and ourselves as a part of organizational culture and policy. So thank you. Thank you for sharing that.

You know, last question here. So we're in this new era, the political era, the attacks on the nonprofit sector have really ramped up in an extreme way. So how do we keep this conversation about living wages, thriving wages, the aspirations and what we can do now in California and across the country? How do we keep this conversation going with funders and fundraisers and nonprofits and organizers, given that we're now in yet another urgent emergency crisis situation? So I'll put that to you first, Kara, because I'm struggling with it myself and a bunch of people in our network are as well.

00:48:47:21

KARA

Yeah, I mean, I think this is central to all these conversations we've been having about how do we support and defend communities in this moment and for a long term, how do we win as a movement? I think bottom line, we just continue to say when organizers can make ends meet, when they can take care of themselves and their loved ones, when they can maintain a pace of work that ensures they don't burn out, that organizations are stronger and more durable and better equipped to win.

I think a lesson from the first Trump administration from the early days of the pandemic is just recognizing how many folks we lost to burnout and just the pace of the work, the urgency, the like many fires that folks were moving between, and that's just something that continues to be top of mind for me that I think has come up in a lot of conversations around. And we learn from that and how do we do differently this time.

Recognizing that when we lose organizers, when they burn out, we also lose their experience, we lose their relationships with the base, the organizers or the organizations are having to hire new organizers and train them. And so I think there's a values answer of like, we want to treat people well because that's how we live our values and it's also strategic because, you know, that's how we build the organizers that we need to really build the people power that we need and win the world that we want.

00:50:06:15

RUSTY

Thank you for laying that out, I hope people are listening. What resources should people turn to if they want to learn more, Kara?

00:50:13:12

KARA

We'll share some links. We have all of our resources on our website, allduerespectproject.org. And so there's resources for organizers, for directors, and for funders. I think also, specifically if you're a funder or grantee in this conversation, a great place to start is just by having some of those conversations that Gaby was talking about with each other and sharing what the state of the work is right now. But again, you can go to our website at allduerespectproject.org and we're always excited to explore potential for new opportunities and projects as well. So please reach out directly if you want to have a conversation about that.

00:50:52:04

RUSTY

Thank you, Kara. We should say that Staffing the Mission, which was another partner organization that became part of Fund the People at the end of 2023, partnered with All Due Respect on the Sustainable Jobs Toolkit. And so there are links to the Sustainable Jobs Toolkit from the Staffing the Mission section of the Fund the People website, as well as, from allduerespectproject.org. So you can go to fundthepeople.org in the main menu, go to Staffing the Mission and find some great resources there as well. Gaby, how can folks learn more about ÓRALE and your work?

00:51:30:07

GABY

Yes, you can reach us by [@oralelb](https://www.instagram.com/oralelb). You'll find us on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, all the social media, and our website is orale.org.

00:51:40:04

RUSTY

All right, excellent. So that's orale.org. Thank you both so much, this has been a really enlightening and inspiring conversation, and I think our listeners will get a ton out of it and and I hope they do go check out the compensation study, the new labor standards and the letter to funders and other resources that have come out of this pilot and that you all have contributed to. So thank you so much for your leadership in our society, in your communities and in our sector. And thanks for being here today.

00:52:13:17

KARA

Yeah, thank you .

00:52:14:08

GABY

Thank you for having us.

00:52:16:08

RUSTY

Thanks for being with us here on the Fund The People podcast. I hope you'll join us next Wednesday morning as we continue our special biweekly series, Defend Nonprofits Defend Democracy, right here on your Fund The People podcast.

OUTRO

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