

rethink

Media for Security, Rights, and Democracy

THE ISSUES ARE OUR CLIENT

STRENGTHENING MOVEMENTS
THROUGH COMMUNICATIONS

*What we have learned from a decade of
capacity building and collaboration.*

A NOTE FROM THE FOUNDERS

With more than 40 years of cumulative organizing experience between us, we launched ReThink after countless hours of conversation around a few key questions. Why do some movements fail where others succeed? Where is movement work headed? How can we connect more fundamentally to Americans' daily lives and engage them in building a better future? And why do our opponents so frequently dominate public discourse and so consistently frame the terms of debate?

We were deeply impacted by the dual nightmares of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. From the outset, we saw the writing on the wall that spelled a clamp down on civil liberties and a backlash born of prejudice. And while we worked tirelessly against the march to war, the war came nonetheless. Ultimately, there was no escaping the reality that the progressive community had to do better at organizing and articulating a vision for our country.

We also sought to answer a personal question—where could we provide the greatest possible value in service of shaping and empowering that vision?

Finding the answers meant questioning the status quo. And our conclusions became the foundation of ReThink.

The first is that media and communications are central to movement building. Ultimately, we communicate our values successfully and inspire our constituencies or we do not. Strategic communications isn't just about sending out a press release or penning an op-ed, it is about driving a powerful narrative.

Success is not possible, however, if organizations do not have the capacity, the training, and the resources to drive their messages. Building one organization's capacity, meanwhile, is inadequate because no single organization can win a policy victory. Winning lasting change is a team effort. We need to build capacity across movements.



At the same time, there are “economies of scale” benefits to be realized. While we work to provide resources for the grantees of our funding partners, we also provide those resources to other groups they cannot fund, maximizing value. When we provide media tracking for a movement, we save every organization staff time. When we develop a resource to help one group strengthen its media outreach, we also use it to share best practices across an entire sector. And when we reach out to journalists in a rapid response moment, alerting them to experts who are available for comment, we alert them to a comprehensive list—minimizing redundant effort and competition.

Communications can be the glue that binds efforts together. The process of reaching agreement on messaging strategies can involve intense negotiation, but the negotiations themselves can be the means to creating messages with shared input and ownership.

From the outset, we questioned the value of competing for media attention and keeping press lists private. A limited number of journalists cover any given topic. The more everyone in a movement knows who they are, the more we can provide them with different angles and unique voices, ideally driving unified messages. Our goal can't be competing for a slice of the media pie. Our goal has to be creating a bigger pie. And the more we engage the media, the greater the coverage.

Considering these questions, another core principle emerged: data is neutral. In every movement there are differing opinions, egos, and institutional objectives. Debates about “message” can be endless. When we bring data to our movement building work, many of those complicating dynamics are set aside because the numbers don't lie. When we map the media landscape on an issue, we can see where we are winning and losing. We can see where our opportunities are and where threats exist. We can see whether messages are resonating or not. And these findings don't belong to any single organization—they belong to the movement. They represent shared challenges and insights that require shared responses. And every data point is an opportunity for learning, allowing us to refine and adapt our collective work and strengthen our hand for the next struggle.

We held another principle, perhaps most dearly of all.

We are deeply committed partners in the struggles we take on. We have fielded countless urgent requests and managed dozens of crisis communications scenarios, often working 24/7 alongside our colleagues. We never keep track of those hours and we spend as much time on organizing as we do on straight media work. We aim to be an ally to all of the groups we serve, a partner in the struggle, and a friend they can trust.

Over the course of our first decade, we've learned so much that we cannot hope to capture it all in these pages. We are proud to have seen so many of our founding ideas come to fruition. We are humbled by the opportunity to work with some of the most amazing organizations in the country. And on a daily basis, we are in awe of our co-workers' commitment, resilience, and creativity.

As we enter our second decade, we continue to strengthen ReThink's core capacity and to create a sustainable infrastructure to take that learning to new levels and new issues. We cannot predict all that the next decade will hold, but we can say with absolute certainty that we will face those challenges informed and strengthened by the ongoing learning that we hope defines ReThink.

LYNN FAHSELT + PETER FERENBACH

THE RETHINK MODEL



Movements most powerfully come together and capture the public imagination where they intersect with their audience—in the media. While organizations have members and constituencies, most Americans form an understanding of an issue through the media, through contested discourse, and through the values they associate with each “side,” rather than through any individual organization.

That’s why our motto (coined first by one of our staff) grew to become, “The issues are our client.” What does this mean? It means working to align messages and provide capacity-building support across an entire sector. It means no billable hours and the ability to say yes to helping organizations who are doing great work, but do not have the resources or staff to get that work out there. And it means monitoring the issues 24/7 and helping organizations and community members respond quickly to an unforeseen crisis or opportunity, whether or not we have ever worked with them before.

So, what are the key ingredients to building cohesion and centering capacity building that benefits an entire sector?

HOW DO WE HELP BUILD MOVEMENTS?

- + We dig deep into data and analysis to determine where our spokespeople are succeeding, where we’re losing ground, and where we have the greatest opportunities to advance our narratives.
- + We deliver communications training, tailored to the groups we work with and the issues they work on, to help new and established voices better capture the media’s attention and shine light on their work.
- + We strategically map the media landscape, informed by our own deep and ongoing engagement with the policies and organizations involved, to ensure that the right voices are heard, at the right moment, and in the right mediums to shift public opinion and achieve policy wins.
- + We eliminate duplication and conserve limited resources by providing centralized access to specialized tools, resources, and training that are often out of reach or deprioritized.
- + And we’re right there, in the trenches, alongside the groups we work with, working as a partner to build their capacity for the future.

You’ll hardly ever see our name in print. We deliberately operate behind the scenes and we work hard to be a neutral convener. To us, success looks like building greater cohesion; centering the voices of the advocates, experts, and community spokespeople that we work with; and reaching and building a broader constituency—a constituency that values and stands up for civil and human rights, a stronger and more representative democracy, and international cooperation and diplomacy.

THE RETHINK MODEL

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INNOVATION AND EMERGENT LEARNING



COMMUNICATE COLLABORATIVELY

We focus on collaborative communications.

The easiest analogy is to a team sport. A professional team has players who specialize in their roles. They work together. They are most successful when they each maximize their individual strengths in pursuit of a shared goal—winning. Organizations are no different.

By helping each organization pinpoint its strategic perspective and additive value in a campaign, we can propel the issue into public consciousness. In communications terms, we don't want to fight over the same column inches or sound bites, we want to measurably increase the number of column inches and sound bites for the issue overall.

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During the 5th anniversary of *Citizens United*, organizations demonstrated that the ReThink ethos had successfully penetrated the internal dynamics of the collaborative. Every year following an election, organizations regularly produced at-times competing research reports. When the 5th anniversary came around following the 2014 elections, groups took it upon themselves to better coordinate the release of their respective reports and organize a joint event highlighting findings across all of the reports. ReThink was still there to provide some connective tissue, guide the messaging, and ensure press coverage, but in important ways, the collaboration occurred organically among the organizations. The ReThink model was operating on auto-pilot.

TYLER CREIGHTON

Democracy Collaborative



CASE STUDY

COMING TOGETHER TO DEMAND ARMS REDUCTIONS

When working to ratify the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (or New START Treaty) in 2010, ReThink worked with the arms control and disarmament community to adopt a shared messaging strategy that defined why the treaty was critical. We identified national security validators and other key spokespeople to convey those messages, and we helped them write and place op-eds in the outlets that were most critical to influencing lawmakers.

The campaign played to each organization's strengths: experts and groups focused on policy churned out compelling analysis; those with deep Capitol Hill connections provided timely intelligence, enabling grassroots groups to quickly mobilize their constituents and turn up the temperature on lawmakers; and groups focused on public communications worked together to drive a cohesive and deliberate message.

ReThink refined press lists throughout the campaign, allowing organizations to reach out to specific journalists

to shape how the public learned more about the treaty. We monitored Twitter throughout the Senate debate, flagging opportunities for the campaign to respond to influential reporters, thought leaders, and lawmakers.

We weren't the only ones working around the clock to win this policy battle. Well-financed opponents of arms control and disarmament engaged in savvy, targeted efforts to derail the treaty. But our collaborative efforts—the combined strengths and smarts of all of the groups across the sector—won the day.

And our post-media coverage analysis data showed it: When it came time for the Senate vote, positive, pro-treaty op-eds and editorials dramatically outnumbered opposition content in every state we prioritized—nationwide, there were 219 op-eds and 91 editorials published in favor of ratifying the treaty and only 89 op-eds and 20 editorials against it—and the treaty was ratified.



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Sometimes the most successful communication campaign is one where the conversation *doesn't* happen as a big national debate. Using the right validators with the right message and engaging the target (in this case, Senators) directly can be more effective when the hyper-partisan elements of a higher profile national fight aren't engaged.

NATHAN BRITTON

Peace & Security Collaborative

STRENGTHEN MESSAGE COHESION

People understand and relate to different issues through topline messages and core values—both ours and our opposition's. While any “one message fits all” approach is destined to fail, some message cohesion is imperative to build public support for an issue and win long-term policy change. Overtly competing messages, stories of infighting amongst movement players, or a lack of clarity on what we are asking people to do, not only confuses our audiences, it actively excludes them from participating in positive change.

In our experience, there are **four critical components to developing message cohesion**. First, a thorough, and objectively grounded, understanding of how the public—more specifically our target audiences—feel about an issue and what messages move them to action. Second, the buy-in of organizations, experts, and spokespeople to adopt and advance those messages. Third, a multi-year commitment to supporting organizations in reaching those audiences and implementing those messaging shifts in all of their communications. And fourth, continually adapting those core messages to be relevant to new political developments and shifts in public opinion.

With this in mind, we advance messaging research to engage targeted audiences and we support projects that from the outset involve the organizations that will need to use the findings to shift a narrative. This includes getting groups' input on which audiences they most want to reach and which opposition messages they find the most difficult to combat. We view the process of message development as a movement-building exercise in its own right, with multiple organizations ideally involved in shaping and informing research efforts.

Starting the process with the input of the groups also guides our choices within the research. For example, a desire on the part of the voting rights community to understand what values key audiences associated with voting and voter suppression led us to choose ethnographic research in Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Latinx communities. When researching whether the increased salience of nuclear weapons and concerns over President Trump's sole authority to launch them could be translated in action, we brought on a psychologist who evaluated our focus groups to better understand the role that fear and helplessness were playing and what message approaches might empower people. When we wanted

to understand how to make fair courts and judicial independence relevant to more Americans, we worked with a cognitive linguist to examine the words and narratives most common in American culture. In each of these cases, the research process involved extensive engagement with both the organizations and the researchers, leading to better research and more buy-in.

Once the research is complete, we produce synthesized message guides, digital content for social media, extensive hands-on message-framing workshops for spokespeople, and an evolving set of talking points and suggested pivots in response to breaking news.

With more sophisticated campaigns, wherein different speakers and organizations agree to drive mutually reinforcing themes and values, we measure our success at “on-message” communications. We use the shared buy-in that a good process engenders to affirm “on-message” media commentary and discreetly flag “off-message” content with the speakers in question.

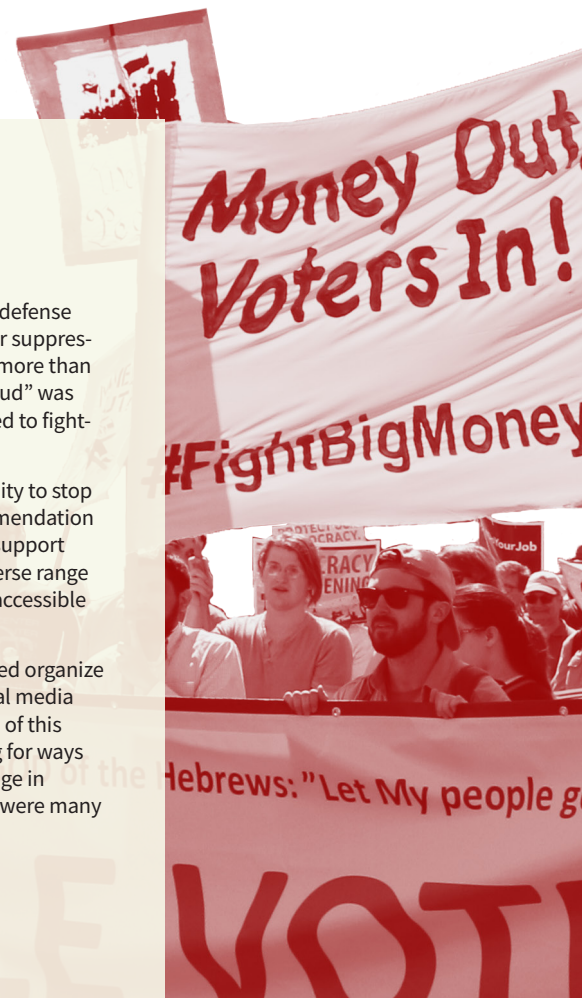
CASE STUDY

A UNIFIED VOICE TO TAKE ON INJUSTICE

ReThink's analysis found that for the past several years, the voting rights movement has been playing defense and delivering our messages on the opposition's terrain. We found that discussions of vote fraud, voter suppression, and voter ID made up nearly 40 percent of news coverage on voting rights in 2016 and 2017—far more than discussion of aspirational, pro-voter policies. Refuting our opponents' disinformation about “voter fraud” was only elevating their frame and reinforcing their language. And because voting rights advocates are used to fighting legal and legislative battles to uphold rights, our messaging is too often defensive and legalistic.

Rather than continuing to play on our opponents' turf, ReThink encouraged the voting rights community to stop using our opponents' language and instead focus their messaging on pro-voter solutions. This recommendation was based on message research showing that this framing was far more likely to encourage voters to support policies that expand voter participation overall. We also focused on elevating the voices of a more diverse range of spokespeople at the community level, whose life experiences and personal stories would be more accessible to their own target audiences.

When the Trump Administration launched its so-called “Election Integrity Commission,” ReThink helped organize a community-wide response effort including strategy calls; shared talking points and messaging; social media content; and writing, pitching, and placing op-eds and expert commentary. Our message was: instead of this sham commission in search of a problem where there was none, the administration should be looking for ways to expand access to the polls, such as automatic voter registration and early voting. Our unified message in social media was to galvanize Americans to call on the commission to #RespectMyVote. Though there were many factors at play, the administration disbanded the commission.





TheMostMona
@mona_haydar

I'm not silent when ISIS tries to hijack my religion. I replace their hatred with love & doughnuts. #CanYouHearUsNow

1,344 9:47 AM · Aug 1, 2016



Dalia Fahmy
@DaliaFFahmy

Replying to @DaliaFFahmy

#CanYouHearUsNow As a politics professor I lecture to many silent men, because I'm the expert in the room. @DMogahed

1,046 9:25 AM · Aug 1, 2016

CASE STUDY

A HASHTAG TO SPEAK UP

In the lead-up to the 2016 election, anti-Muslim rhetoric was at an all-time high, driven by then-candidate Trump. To counter this anti-Muslim prejudice, Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton invited Gold Star parents Khizr and Ghazala Khan to the Democratic National Convention to speak about their son, Humayun, an Army officer who was killed in Iraq.

News outlets across the media spectrum portrayed the Khans as among the most compelling speakers at the convention. Trump, however, was quick to misleadingly exploit one aspect: only Khizr had spoken, while Ghazala stood stoically and silently beside him. Trump questioned whether the Khans' religion prohibited Ghazala from speaking. She responded in a poignant op-ed in the Sunday *Washington Post*, explaining that she had not spoken because it was still too painful for her, and that she still cried every time she tried.

Advocates in the Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian communities wanted to launch a campaign supporting Ghazala and condemning Trump's hateful (and insensitive) attack.

We knew from our own research that even amongst our "base" of supporters, many people had misguided ideas about Muslim women. To counter those assumptions, we designed a rapid response campaign to educate voters, while denouncing the anti-Muslim sentiment rampant in the presidential campaign. We encouraged the community to post on social media to spotlight the many ways that Muslim women use their voice, contribute to their communities, and improve the world around them. And we urged the community to use the hashtag #CanYouHearUsNow to illustrate that these Muslim women have been speaking up and speaking out the whole time ... and that maybe people like Trump just need to listen.

The #CanYouHearUsNow campaign produced more than 67,000 tweets from 45,000 people around the world, with an estimated 390 million potential impressions, and it also lifted up new voices and taught people that these Muslim women have plenty to say and are perfectly capable of speaking their minds.

USE DATA TO DRIVE STRATEGY

Different movements have very different needs.

We begin every long-term commitment with an extensive needs assessment examining the capacity of the groups in the sector. We couple this with a detailed media audit to identify where that movement is winning or losing with regard to their media engagement. In each case, the goal is to pinpoint where increased capacity will prove most effective and to establish baselines for measuring progress toward those goals.

Given that the goal is to use the media to shape public opinion, our analysis team also routinely tracks opinion trends, producing regular synthesized analyses—including specific messaging recommendations—that go to hundreds of subscribers. While commissioned research efforts are best directed at message development, tracking and analyzing publicly available polling, in the aggregate and around key media moments, allows our team to provide organizations with solid and timely intelligence to inform their work.

CASE STUDY

THE POWER OF DATA TO TELL STORIES

In 2011, Rep. Peter King, then-chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, held a highly politicized hearing on the “radicalization of the American Muslim community.” He cited recent domestic terrorism cases linked to American Muslims, such as a shooting on a military base in Fort Hood, TX, and an attempted bombing in Times Square (which was thwarted by a Muslim man, a New York cab driver).

Americans who were perceived as Muslim were already facing heightened incidents of hate crimes and Islamophobia in the wake of these events. The hearing would do even greater damage, unjustly tying these communities to extremists and inviting even uglier attacks and infringements on both their rights and safety.

In preparation for the hearings, ReThink conducted an extensive audit of opposition messages in print, broadcast, and online media outlets, examining coverage of domestic terrorism and related issues in the 18 months leading up to the hearing. Our goal was to prepare advocacy organizations for the most likely accusations and lines of questioning to best position the movement to discredit both the hearing and the potential witnesses.

In the 10 weeks leading up to the hearings, ReThink worked with groups to implement a sector-wide strategic communications plan, including op-ed and Capitol Hill strategies.

We tracked all of the coverage, co-hosted a weekly strategy call, and worked with advocacy organizations to develop messages.

Drawing on our messaging and opposition research, we worked with organizations to define a cohesive message that we could drive as a sector: *the hearing was modern day McCarthyism—dangerous, counterproductive, and full of easily refuted claims*. Within that shared framework, we developed messages for a much wider set of groups and allies, including national security and interfaith validators, underscoring that, although these spokespeople come from vastly different perspectives, the underlying point was the same—this was a *witch hunt* grounded in prejudiced assumptions that would not make anyone safer.

To ensure that our community’s spokespeople could be first to frame their perspectives in the media, we developed tailored press lists of the top editors and reporters covering the hearing. To help prepare them for interviews, we provided pivot-points and counter arguments to the most prevalent opposition messages.

DID WE SUCCEED?

Did we successfully use data to inform and drive a strategy? Were our groups, in fact, the first to frame the coverage? Did our messages and messengers break through?

Did we effectively challenge the credibility of the hearings, Rep. King, and the “experts” who were called to testify? What lessons could we take forward, as a movement, to continue to challenge our opposition, shift public opinion, and advance the rights of the Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian (MASA) community?

In a word, yes. We conducted another audit of coverage of the hearings to measure the volume, sentiment, top messengers, and key messages. When we compared it to coverage in the 18 months leading up to the hearings, we saw dramatic improvement. Across the board, our collaborative efforts and cohesion had paid off.

Because they were the first to tell their story, organizations in the MASA community drove media coverage in print, broadcast, and on the wires. The sector’s coordinated message framing performed nearly three times better than oppositional framing in op-ed, editorial, and commentary coverage; two times better in print and wire coverage; and nearly two times better in broadcast coverage.

Just as important, the community built relationships with key reporters and allies, such as national security, interfaith, and Capitol Hill validators—relationships it could count on for support again in the future. We know because we track what they say, as well!

POSITIVE MEDIA COVERAGE OF MASA ISSUES ROSE BY 15% AFTER OUR FRAMING.

An average of opinion, editorial, print, wire service, and broadcast coverage.

COVERAGE BEFORE RETHINK FRAMING

52% positive

48% negative

COVERAGE AFTER RETHINK FRAMING

67% positive

33% negative

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This will be phenomenally helpful to my organization’s work, and I am so thankful to ReThink for bringing this expertise to the disability rights community.

In particular, I thought that the data analysis that started the two days [of training] was the perfect frame for our work and was mindblowing.

MICHELLE BISHOP

National Disability Rights Network

CASE STUDY

DATA SHOWS VALUE OF A UNIFIED RESPONSE

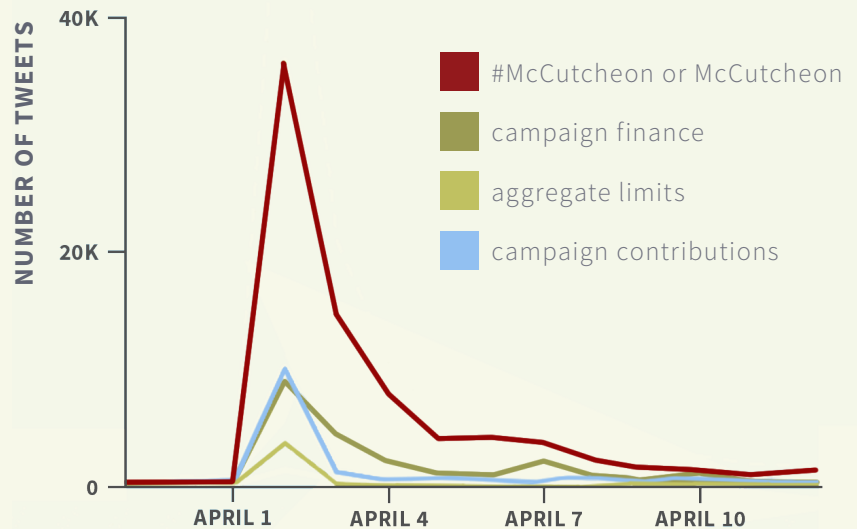
In 2013, before launching a new collaborative, ReThink Media conducted a benchmark audit of media coverage about money in politics. This audit found that, among other things, the money-in-politics community talked extensively about the problem of big money, but not nearly enough about solutions to the problem. And when it was talking about solutions, it was talking about a whole slew of solutions, with competing ideas and different messaging.

The benchmark audit also found that the online conversation was cacophonous, spread across 35 hashtags on Twitter, with a peak of about 1,500 tweets per day.

So when the US Supreme Court heard *McCutcheon v. FEC*, which challenged the aggregate limit individuals could donate to candidates for federal office, political parties, and political action committees, the community needed to align around messages that also pointed to solutions. ReThink helped the community rally around one hashtag, #McCutcheon, to unify their posts into a single stream that was easy for others to tune into. From there, groups could pivot to their preferred policy solutions.

On the day of the *McCutcheon* oral arguments, there were approximately 1,500 tweets *per hour* talking about the case and about 12,000 tweets overall. The results of a more cohesive, community-wide effort were proof enough to bring advocacy organizations together to form a joint strategy around the Supreme Court's decision, which paid even greater dividends.

The day of the decision, we saw a peak of 60,000 tweets with a potential 151.7 million impressions. While groups drove a drumbeat of criticism about the decision, they also worked together, informed by our messaging research, to propose positive policy solutions as part of every message. Not inconsequentially, our tracking of public opinion also showed us that more than three quarters of Americans think money in politics is a problem, but less than a quarter thought there was a viable solution.



UNIFIED TWITTER ACTIVITY HELPED BRING NEWS OF THE MCCUTCHEON DECISION TO A MUCH WIDER AUDIENCE

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I was really impressed at [ReThink's] ability to come together across the stovepipes that had kept us from working together in the past. For the first time, I felt like we were speaking with one voice... All of these groups are working on different remedies ... but this is the first time that I felt like we were all in this together, instead of getting stuck in different realities.

MARGE BAKER

People for the American Way

OUR FAVORITE DATA POINTS

As an organization that spends more than its fair share of time poring over data and its implications for the movements we work with, sometimes there are certain data points that stay with us for years. Here are a few of our favorites:

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The day that the US Supreme Court ruled in *McCutcheon* showed us a meteoric metric rise on social media that was happening in real time. It really was this moment that people saw their work reflected back to them by strangers. It wasn't just us tweeting our own work or our coalition's work; everyday people were talking about it. I remember seeing numbers later in the day thinking, 'That's a pretty good day.' See it in the chart—it's beautiful.

SCOTT SWENSON

Democracy Collaborative

My favorite chart is the graph showing the volume of US news coverage for our trainees in the first half of 2018 versus the second half. All of our trainees combined had 41 news hits in Quarters 1 and 2—and a stunning 245 news hits in Quarters 3 and 4. That was a solid indicator that our spokesperson trainings truly build communications and media relations capacity among our participants, and their ability to effectively amplify their own work and voices in the news as a result.

GRACIE FARESE

Rights & Inclusion Collaborative

Some data points stick out because they helped us understand the idiosyncrasies of the media landscape for a particular field. A good example is finding that journalists were quoting unnamed government sources at unusually high rates in reporting about drone strikes and targeted killing. This demonstrated that the government was trying to control reporting about this issue much more than they did in other areas of national security or military intervention.

EVA GALANES-ROSENBAUM

Media & Opinion Analysis

At the launch of our work with voting rights groups, ReThink partnered with an ethnographic researcher to conduct over a hundred interviews in the communities groups most wanted to reach—Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), and Millennial audiences. Our questions included: What level of importance and value did they associate with voting? How strongly did they agree with the need to protect the right to vote and address issues of voter suppression?

What we found was that each associated a unique set of values with voting: Black with equality and accessibility; Latinx with freedom and responsibility; AAPI with responsibility and equality; Millennial with freedom and equality. Equally significant, they had not personally experienced voter suppression and did not feel that it was an issue. Instead, they saw voting as an individual act and the choice to vote as entirely based on personal preference.

Understanding the importance of these core values and the disconnect between how advocates and our audiences saw voting is vital to reframing the conversation and broadening the base of the movement.

LYNN FAHSELT

Co-founder and Executive Director

POWER RAPID RESPONSE

There are really two types of media engagements: those where you execute a proactive plan and those where you spring into action in response to breaking news stories. Both—the known and the unknown—done correctly, require a sustained infrastructure, a substantial amount of coordination, and ever-deepening partnerships and trust-building with and among the communities and allies we work with.

In these moments, we work with our partners not just to win the news cycle, but to seize the opportunity to build the movement around our issues. In the case of crisis response, while often painful and extremely stressful, the way we choose to respond can help the community coordinate, address internal conflicts, teach new skills, expand impact, and develop muscle memory for future collaborative work. In some scenarios, our rapid response is tailored for coalitions of organizations wherein we provide shared messaging, pivot points, and updates about how coverage is playing out in real time both online and off. In other scenarios, our rapid response zeroes in on individual organizations in need of support.

With members of our team working from coast to coast, organizations have come to rely on ReThink to provide near-24-hour media monitoring to help impacted communities navigate the news cycle.

WHAT DOES RETHINK MEDIA DO TO HELP IN A CRISIS?

- + Provide talking points and messaging guidance.
- + Pitch experts available across the sector.
- + Highlight opportunities to jump into the social media conversation and reframe the narrative.
- + Offer our members tailored press lists with the right reporters to cover the story.
- + Prep spokespeople for interviews.
- + Drive coordinated op-ed and editorial campaigns.
- + Facilitate multi-organizational press conferences.

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The mass shooting inside a Sikh house of worship on August 5, 2012 was a moment where ReThink’s rapid response work became critical. Within hours, ReThink was providing direct media support to the Sikh Coalition and the Sikh community, and that support continued around the clock for six weeks. A year later, ReThink worked with the Sikh Coalition to mark the one-year anniversary and drive messages that combat hate overall, while better educating the American public about the Sikh community. While we did invaluable work in response to this tragedy, we also learned some valuable lessons about what does and doesn’t work in crisis response. Example: How do you successfully get leading experts on national television within two hours? You learn that you have to start by positioning those experts before a crisis ever hits.

The beauty of the ReThink model is that those lessons get absorbed and translated to future rapid response initiatives with other organizations and communities that improves the overall communications work across all of the sectors.

MARK READING-SMITH

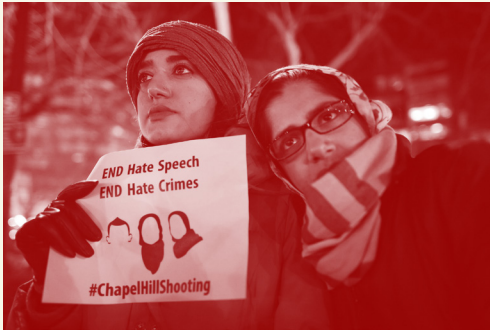
*Rights & Inclusion Collaborative;
Currently with Sikh Coalition*

CASE STUDIES

SHARED MESSAGING BREAKS THROUGH IN A CRISIS

OAK CREEK, WI, AUGUST 2012

Within an hour of the mass shooting at a Sikh Gurdwara in Oak Creek, WI, in August 2012, ReThink was working with the Sikh Coalition to get their response out to top media outlets, and with the larger Muslim, Arab, and South Asian (MASA) community to shape and promote vigils nationwide. Although the shooting was devastating, through our rapid response efforts, the Sikh Coalition became the national “go-to” source on civil rights issues affecting the Sikh community. The larger MASA community aligned around shared messaging, key spokespeople, and unifying visual elements at the vigils and beyond. The shared messaging helped shift the national conversation to one of pluralism—“We are all Sikhs”—and toward a message that an attack on any single religious community is an attack on us all.



BOSTON MARATHON, APRIL 2013

In the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombing, we sent one of our senior staff to provide full-time on-the-ground support to the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center. At the same time, the wider collaborative of MASA organizations and community members were eager to stand as allies. In addition to supporting the ISBCC, we provided groups with talking points, messaging guidance, and social media best practices, aimed at shifting the media narrative from focusing on the attackers’ faith to instead focusing on the resilient response of a united and pluralistic community. We underscored a shared set of values—“We are all #BostonStrong”—emphasizing that we are stronger when we stand together and weaker when we allow fear and bigotry to divide us.



PULSE NIGHTCLUB, ORLANDO, JUNE 2016

And after the tragic Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, our staff became the de facto communications shop for the Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity, which was inundated with hundreds of calls from the press and had no capacity to handle them. We helped triage the media requests, organized a press call, matched spokespeople to high-priority outlets, and pitched and placed op-eds. Additionally, we provided talking points to the White House liaison for the Muslim community, helping to inform President Obama’s response to the crisis.

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We’ve gotten wind of lots of useful stories before they’ve appeared on listservs or come from our in-house media people, so whatever you’re doing to get them to us quickly, it’s working.

Center for Constitutional Rights

When Miami-Dade Mayor and County Commissioners refused to count the nearly 150,000 signatures gathered for a public financing ballot measure, ReThink helped local organizers turn up the heat on their elected officials through a suite of social media e



AMPLIFY NEW VOICES

When it comes to creating policy change and moving public opinion, who gets heard matters. We refer to this as “voiceshare.” Voiceshare is one of the first data points we look at in every issue we work on. Knowing the top opposition messages and messengers and how prevalent they are relative to our own is critical. If our goal is to move the public to understand and adopt our policies, and the public is not even hearing our messages and perspective, then we are not going to move an issue forward.

While our work to strengthen voiceshare varies widely across each of our issue areas, two critical components remain the same: 1) centering the voices of those who are most affected by the issues and policies in question, and 2) ensuring that our spokespeople are trusted by and representative of the people we need to reach. ReThink works with organizations not only to strengthen the skills of their current spokespeople but to identify up-and-coming leaders and allied voices. We train them; connect them with targeted reporters; and help write, edit, and pitch content, amongst other strategies.

8.5 MILLION SPOKESPEOPLE

In the week after President Trump announced the first iteration of the Muslim Ban in 2017, a Media Matters study found that fewer than 8 percent of guests on prime-time cable news shows talking about the ban were, themselves, Muslim. This pattern is familiar from most coverage of Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian (MASA) people in the US: most Americans are not hearing the voices of people most affected by these policies and attitudes.

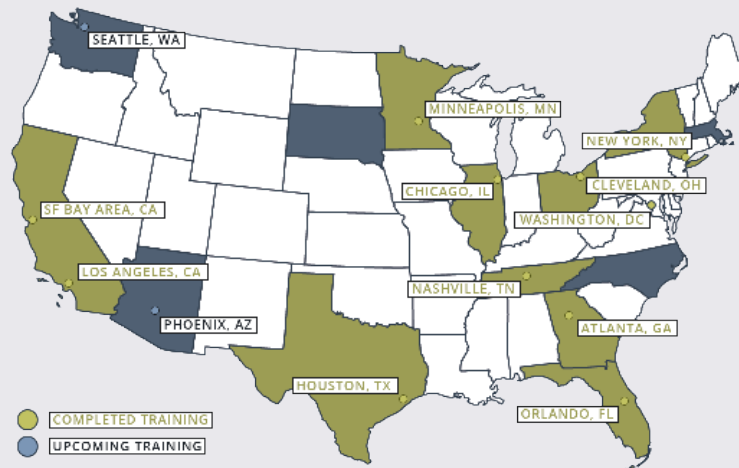
To address this glaring void in major media coverage, ReThink Media launched an online speakers’ bureau, called eightpointfivemillion.org. 8.5 million is the estimated population of MASA residents in the US, and this name underscored the breadth of people who can talk about their own lived experiences and who are experts on related issues. And we took our signature spokesperson training program on the road, hosting local trainings for community leaders across the country. After two years and training nearly 250 spokespeople, we have seen a 498 percent increase in their voiceshare in media coverage.

GENDER PARITY IN PEACE & SECURITY

When it comes to issues of war and peace, we work to increase media attention on those whose lives have been directly impacted by drone strikes on civilian populations and to broaden the spectrum of voices that are heard in Beltway foreign policy debates. Our media statistics show that, over the last four years, journalists have quoted men from the arms control and disarmament community more than 80 percent of the time, while women from the same community have been quoted less than 20 percent of the time.

In response, ReThink has supported a variety of efforts to change this ratio. Contributing to those efforts, ReThink has partnered with Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security to train a cadre of women, women of color, and young people in media skills, from writing op-eds to nailing broadcast interviews, enabling them to shape a new era of American foreign policy.

RIGHTS & INCLUSION TRAININGS, 2016 - 2019.



245 Mentions of Trainees

41 Mentions of Trainees

Before Training

After Training

COVERAGE OF 2018 SPOKESPERSON TRAINEES ROSE NEARLY 6X AFTER OUR TRAININGS.



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I work for a progressive news outlet, and am always on the lookout for smart, diverse voices to help our readers understand complex stories on tight deadlines. ReThink Media has helped connect me with those sources, ones who take the time to give the type of context that elevates our work above the reactionary noise dominating so much of the news cycle.

D. PARVAZ

Foreign Policy Reporter, Washington, D.C.

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I've attended a few media trainings, and this one was more helpful than most because it was tailored to the audience, both by bringing our public personas into the content and because it was tailored specifically to our challenges as women of color. I appreciated the recognition and embracing of individuality even as you provided best practices. Additionally, the ability to ask questions and share our experiences really enriched the experience.

CAMILLE STEWART

New America's Cybersecurity Initiative

CASE STUDY

PUTTING TRAINING INTO PRACTICE



After a spate of efforts to roll back citizens' voting rights, ReThink is working with local, state, and national voting rights experts and advocates to drive pro-voter policies across the country. This includes building a whole new cadre of local and state spokespeople. So far that has included local spokesperson trainings in Texas, Georgia, Nebraska, Wisconsin, New York, North Carolina, and Mississippi.

Jamal Watkins, vice president of civic engagement at the NAACP, attended a two-day training with us in Atlanta in 2018, where we covered the findings of our

two-year audit of media, messaging, and public opinion in the voting rights sector, as well as message guidance informed by several message research projects. We followed up with talking points, a workshop focused on how to go on offense and drive your own message, and hands-on practice in writing and placing op-eds.

Just weeks later, Jamal appeared on TV and pivoted from a question asked to him about “election integrity” and voter ID to discussing the barriers to participation and the need for a pro-voter agenda—perfectly mirroring the research recommendations.

A PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

An organization's accomplishments ultimately boil down to the talent and commitment of the people involved. From Day One, ReThink has drawn on the amazing passion, smarts, and creativity of staff people across all of our teams. Add to this, a deep sense of justice and determination to make a measurable difference to the groups, issues, and communities we work with. There's no better way to capture the drive and innovation that they have brought to our work than to share their own words. You'll see many of their stories throughout this booklet, but we couldn't resist sharing a few more here.

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WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SUCCESS STORY FROM YOUR TIME AT RETHINK?

The US House of Representatives passed the most sweeping package of political reforms in a generation. Beyond the historic bill passage, every member of the House and Senate Democratic caucus co-sponsored the bill when it was introduced. It showed the power of a well-coordinated, well-planned, grassroots policy, advocacy, and communications effort to bring democracy reform to the top of the federal legislative priority list.

ReThink helped coordinate the communications efforts of the Declaration for American Democracy, a diverse coalition of more than 130 state and national groups, including civil rights, environment, labor, and government reform organizations. We facilitated weekly communications meetings, drove social media strategy and content, and developed a message guide and tool kit for the coalition, which enabled the advocates to push for the passage of this historic legislation.

SPENCER OLSON
Democracy Collaborative

Project South asked us to help with media coverage of a client whose aging Iran-based mother needed cancer treatment only available in the US. The Muslim Ban was keeping her out of the country and her requests for a visa were going nowhere. Our team helped draft and pitch an op-ed in the local paper where the hospital that provides the treatment is located, but the paper instead opted to cover the story in a feature piece. Once it was published, we facilitated an aggressive campaign of pushing the story to the US Department of State's social media accounts, particularly targeting public affairs, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and the Near East Affairs department.

This targeted campaign attracted D.C. and national reporters, who picked up the story and started calling their State Department contacts, asking for comment. Days later, the State Department relented in the face of growing media scrutiny and the client's mother got her visa. Now, she has beat her lethal brain disease.

COREY SAYLOR
Rights & Inclusion Collaborative

Our work with New Florida Majority on their money-in-politics ballot measure was a roller-coaster of a ride from the submission of petition signatures to the end of Accountable Miami-Dade's journey in the courts.

We had to fight from the beginning just to get the County to count the signatures—which we successfully pushed for with inside/outside pressure, media visibility, and a social media campaign #StartCounting. While ultimately Miami-Dade voters did not get the chance to vote on the Accountable Miami-Dade ballot measure, the coalition hustled hard and to the bitter end to give Miami-Dade voters a voice in making their democracy work for their community.

GINNA GREEN
Democracy Collaborative



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After noticing that several Israeli national security experts were splitting from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and supporting the Iran negotiations, we pitched the story to a few key reporters. In the middle of a hearing with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, then-Secretary of State John Kerry used one of the articles we helped place as a key piece of evidence, reading the headline out loud and actually holding up his printout so it would be visible to the committee and the cameras.

I was watching the hearing on C-SPAN live and yelled out loud and captured a screenshot, staring at the screen in disbelief that an email that I sent resulted in a story being used to defend the Iran nuclear deal to Congress. After that, the refrain of “Israel’s security experts actually believe the Iran deal would make us safer” was one of the most powerful messages advocates used.

DEEPIKA CHOUDHARY

Peace & Security Collaborative

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WHAT'S THE BIGGEST LESSON YOU'VE LEARNED WHILE AT RETHINK?

The difference between being right and being effective. At ReThink, we are constantly training our experts how to communicate effectively; these trainings have taught me the importance of storytelling, values, and meeting the person you're trying to influence where they are. It helps in every interaction, whether it's writing an op-ed, trying to persuade a member of Congress to do something, or even managing internal dynamics amongst the coalitions we work with.

ALLEGRA HARPOOTLIAN
Peace & Security Collaborative

A smart strategic communications plan doesn't necessarily mean a breakneck pace of social media, traditional media, and on-the-ground communications. And it doesn't always mean chasing public opinion. It means recognizing the levers where pressure needs to be applied and the fulcrums that need aligning to move public opinion. Sometimes that is reinforcing what the public already knows, and sometimes that is providing new ways to look at the problems and opportunities ahead of us.

NICK LYELL
Democracy Collaborative

All advocacy is rooted in empathy. Not just empathy for the people whose rights are being violated, but also empathy for the audience you are trying to connect with. This is all the more important in socially and politically divided times—we need to acknowledge the racism and bias that goes into belief systems in order to dismantle those prejudices.

ASHLEY HOUGHTON
Rights & Inclusion Collaborative

The psychology of the words you use matters! I learned to always think backwards from my target audience and figure out what words and phrases would resonate best with them, while also maintaining the authenticity of the narrative to remain true to the cause at hand.

ZAINAB CHAUDARY
Rights & Inclusion Collaborative

I am constantly learning that there's always more to learn. Whether it's a policy nuance, a new social media tool, new polling that suggests there may be better ways to communicate about our issues, there are always opportunities to challenge previously held knowledge and conventional wisdom about our work.

MANUELA EKOWO
Democracy Collaborative



INNOVATION AND EMERGENT LEARNING

ReThink Media is obsessed—with experimentation, measurement, analysis, and learning.

As a data-driven organization, we track the results of nearly everything we do, and we match that by routinely capturing subjective reviews from those who take part in a ReThink Media skills training or use one of the resources we create. We poll organizations on what they would find most helpful in their work and we poll people on what resources they are using and how.

We see each campaign and each of our three collaboratives as learning laboratories. We take key findings from one area of our work and apply them to campaigns in other issue areas. We derive lessons cross-collaboratively and share best practices with the hundreds of organizations that we work with, informed by that learning.

As the Trump administration issued version after version of the Muslim Ban and it made its way to the Supreme Court, we channeled our learning from our work on a previous Supreme Court case: *McCutcheon v. FEC* (see page 10). Though the two cases were vastly different, we used a similar framework to prepare for and organize our response. We convened communications and policy experts across the coalition to develop messaging and strategy, elevated the oral arguments for each case, and used data from

those moments of media coverage to shift our approach to SCOTUS's decision day.

The feedback we received from participants at our first four-day media skills “bootcamp” for arms control and disarmament organizers informed an equally successful four-day training with advocates from the Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian communities. And the lessons from both trainings informed our development of a new communications “bootcamp” for voting rights advocates and for a cohort of awardees of the Doris Duke Building Bridges program.

Our strategy for supporting a nuclear deal with Iran came straight out of the playbook of lessons learned from our successful campaign for a New START Treaty (see page 5). We emphasized national security validators, focused on lawmakers in their own states to support negotiations, leveraged positive editorial coverage, and adapted the topline messages to match the evolving developments of the campaign.

Our work to increase the media visibility of Muslim community spokespeople resulted in our developing a new two-day spokesperson training, reaching more than 250 participants across the country. The lessons learned as we traveled to each state and greeted a new set of potential spokespeople hugely informed our work to increase

the media attention of local voting rights advocates, as well as our work to develop a new and more diverse generation of spokespeople in the public debate about America's foreign and national security policies.

A tool or technology we try out with one team is inherently being tested for its potential to benefit the others. Any intel, press list, or new contact with an outlet or reporter is shared across all of our teams. When we see a burgeoning need across all of the organizations we work with, we look for ways to create resources that can be shared by all. Two recent examples are the development of a Millennials and New Media Guide and a Social Media Toolkit and Workbook.

To augment our own learning, this past year we partnered with an expert in measurement and impact evaluation. She helped us formalize our internal structures and tools for capturing the emergent learning of our teams and for measuring the impact of our work.

Experimentation, measurement, and learning are critical to everything we do at ReThink. It's how we develop tangible experience to confirm which tactics are best practices. It's how we train cohorts of both established and up-and-coming spokespeople to do their most innovative communications work. And ultimately, it's how we win.

**EXPERIMENTATION, MEASUREMENT,
AND LEARNING ARE CRITICAL TO
EVERYTHING WE DO AT RETHINK.**



WHERE WE'RE GOING

We begin the next decade with a clear set of priorities and momentum underway to achieve every one.

To make sure that all Americans have a voice, we are working to raise up the voices of local leaders working for voting rights, train Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security, and develop the media skills of American Muslim community leaders. A pluralistic society requires that all voices are heard and nowhere is this more important than in the media. Whether it's a TV appearance or the written word, authentic spokespeople enrich the policy dialogue and implicitly teach Americans about cultures and perspectives they may have had little exposure to, helping to combat prejudice and build an inclusive America.

To conduct message research that's quick, carefully targeted, and immediately actionable, we are rapidly growing our in-house capacity. We are using new online platforms that allow us to test messages with discrete audiences. Augmenting our relationship with major research firms, this targeted message testing is allowing us to test our messages with direct input from the groups we work with and guarantee that we're fielding impactful language.

We are rolling out a news series of resources focused on Executive Directors and other leaders. We've heard repeatedly that senior staff need more training and support in order to maximize their organization's impact, so we're piloting projects to meet that need. These will range from workshops on "Developing and Supervising a Strategic Communications Plan" and "Building a Comprehensive Social Media Strategy for Your Organization," to "Using the Media to Raise More Money and Build Your Constituency." As with everything, we'll test these new resources, determine what's most beneficial to groups, and refine this specialized capacity building accordingly.

We are working to proactively capture and share lessons learned in movement building. What we've seen is that a successful strategic and innovative approach in advocacy for Democracy is often easily adapted and applied in advocacy for Peace and Security, and vice versa. While we work on a spectrum of issues, the core strategic, tactical, and methodological insights are typically far more universal. With this in mind, we aim to increase our commitment to sharing learning across sectors.

We are evolving a new set of tools for measuring the impact of our work. ReThink was founded with the aim of building more powerful and effective movements. We are driven to learn from what works, and from what doesn't. We don't want to simply implement campaigns and training programs; we want to use those efforts to refine both our own work and the work of our organizational partners, because ultimately, we want to win.

And finally, to continue to sustain and grow out work and do all of the above, we are investing in building our core capacity to meet our staff needs and ensure we can capture the impacts and innovations of each of our program teams.

We have a vision of a just, inclusive, and peaceful America, and heaven knows, we've got a lot of work to do. That's why it's uniquely important to learn from every experience and make sure that all of our efforts are maximized.

We could never fully put into words how grateful we are for the partnerships and the policy successes over the past decade, but from our point of view, we're just getting started.



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ReThink Media helps make intersectionality work by bringing disparate groups together in the fight for equality.

HINA SHAMSI

ACLU





THANK YOU

Thinking back on 10 years of work, all of us at ReThink want to thank the critical funding partners who have made all of our progress possible. In our view, these colleagues are exactly that—partners. We share the same goals and aspirations. Our funding partners want to build and support effective organizations, and they want to invest in strategies and approaches that build strong movements and result in real and lasting victories. They are committed to a just, peaceful, and inclusive America every day, right alongside our staff and organizational partners.

They place their trust in us as a vehicle for their policy goals and we aim to earn and re-earn that trust by spending money frugally and conscientiously, by being genuinely accountable for our results, and by being candid and honest about our strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures.

To begin at the beginning, we'd like to thank the Colombe Foundation, the Ploughshares Fund, the Ford Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. The program officers from those organizations literally sat around a conference table with us to imagine what ReThink could be and to consider how we could best support the Peace and Security community. They invested in us when we were an untested start-up piloting a new and unique approach to media and communications capacity building. They put their faith in our past work and in our vision before we

even had an office or a single staff person and as we launched the organization with only half the funding we were told would be needed.

We'd also like to thank our close colleagues at the Proteus Fund, who have been essential thought-partners and collaborators. Proteus' own smart and innovative approach to developing pooled funds that align and inform funder strategy runs in parallel to our efforts to align the work of like-minded organizations. As a result, we routinely share insights and strategic ideas. Proteus' RISE Together Fund has been at the forefront of work to combat anti-Muslim prejudice and to strengthen the civic engagement of the Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian communities, and they've taken bold and courageous positions. The Piper Fund, meanwhile, has played a transformative role in organizing for democracy, moving efforts to challenge the corrosive influence of moneyed interests on our political system and our courts away from just policy reform and toward a movement fundamentally grounded in a vision of racial and social justice and true democratic inclusion. We'd also like to express our deepest appreciation to each of the many individual funders that participate in Proteus' pooled funds and we are grateful for the very meaningful relationships we have developed with those partners.

We are grateful to the Carnegie Corporation for their unwavering commitment to

international security and for supporting our efforts to strengthen organizations that work to eliminate the existential threat of nuclear weapons. We are grateful to the Democracy Fund for their belief in the spirit and potential of our constitutional system and for helping us work across the entire democracy movement. And we are grateful to the Open Society Foundation (OSF) for their deep commitment to human rights, civil rights, the rule of law, and the richness of a pluralistic society. Despite ugly and anti-semitic attacks on OSF, they have never wavered in their values.

There are others as well. The Mertz Gillmore Foundation has been a remarkable partner in strategic thinking. The Hewlett Foundation provided us with the latitude to evolve our work on nuclear weapons. The Oak Foundation has pursued a special interest in movement communications. And the Doris Duke Foundation's Building Bridges Fund has taken a truly unique approach to elevate Islamic art and culture to strengthen community and combat prejudice and fear directed at American Muslims.

And most recently, we'd like to thank the State Infrastructure Fund for supporting our work to strengthen the movement for full and expanded voting rights. We share their belief in an America where every voice is heard, every vote is counted, and every citizen is valued equally.

“

ReThink’s capacity building mechanisms have been key to helping our field grow its media presence, push back on issues of importance to the Muslim, Arab, and South Asian (MASA) communities with which we work, and speak on the national stage about key issues including the Muslim Ban.

For RISE Together, our relationship with ReThink is symbiotic; RISE Together learns about emerging leaders and organizations in the field through ReThink’s spokesperson trainings, and we collaborate strategically on national campaigns.

Our investment in ReThink and partnership with their Rights and Inclusion team has helped MASA communities and organizations be seen as experts on their own issues and to gain traction in important national conversations about the future of our country.

SHIREEN ZAMAN

Program Director, RISE Together Fund, a program of the Proteus Fund

“This is one of the smartest projects we've seen. [It] will lift our movement.”

KAREN HOBERT FLYNN, Common Cause

“ReThink has been an invaluable partner in our work. We value their expertise, collaborative nature, access to information, and method of letting the field lead to be incredibly important factors in gaining and maintaining trust.”

DEEPA IYER, Civil Rights Activist

“The tremendous array of tools offered by ReThink allow us to be more consistent in our media outreach, focused in our messages, and targeted in our work.”

WILLIAM HARTUNG, Arms and Security Initiative

“[ReThink's media training] was very comprehensive, very relevant, and timely. I loved the format, loved the interaction, loved the professionalism. They came and worked with us one-on-one to give us individual feedback, and that was really amazing. I would recommend this training to everybody.”

SOUMAYA KHALIFA, Islamic Speakers Bureau of Atlanta

“[ReThink's media bootcamp] was by far the most useful, engaging, and stimulating training that I have ever participated in. It should absolutely be required for every young professional in the community.”

KINGSTON REIF, Arms Control Association

“I can't imagine doing my work without the materials and expertise of ReThink Media to draw on. You all are doing amazing work. Thank you!”

ZEKE JOHNSON, Amnesty International USA

“ReThink does a great job of building bridges between organizations, helps get everyone on the same message.”

CHRISTOPHER ANDERS, ACLU