Annual Report

2023-2024

In May of 2023, the leaders of the Calgary Alliance met and decided to take a break from our campaign work so we could focus on reorganizing. One of the “universals” of organizing is that “All organizing is disorganizing and reorganizing.” Taking a break from campaigns to focus on reorganizing is characteristic of all alliances that have stood the test of time. Following COVID, we experienced a loss of some of our leaders as they left their institutions. Others were exhausted and needed a break. Many of our leaders, faced with internal organizational pressures, had to turn their focus toward the pressing needs of their members.

In our reorganizing work, we identified the following areas on which to focus:

1) Recruiting new organizational members with a focus on increasing the diversity of our membership,
2) Relational Meetings – with current institutional leaders, new organizations, new leaders, among our leaders, and with City Councillors,
3) Leadership Development and Training – offering foundations training, regional training, and core team training,
4) Financial Sustainability – building a team, reviewing the viability of our dues for current and new members, donations, and grants,
5) Reviewing our Governance structure
6) Shifting our culture

Three times, we decided to turn from our reorganizing work toward Action as we faced both an opportunity and a crisis to address affordable housing and to support Elder Doreen in establishing new Police protocols after the death of her daughter.

Affordable Housing

During our last listening campaign, we discovered that affordable housing emerged as one of the top issues in our community. As a result, we have taken action to ensure the development of an Affordable Housing Strategy and that it is funded as a part of our city budget. After the Strategy was originally rejected in June, our strategy team decided to take action when it was brought again to the City Council in September 2023. We mobilized our members and partnered with several other organizations to speak before the Council. We organized a rally and wrote to and met

with City Councillors. This all contributed to the Strategy being passed. The Strategy was then funded in the November 2023 budget, and the Federal Government committed to supporting affordable housing in Calgary. They will contribute over $228 million to address the affordable housing crisis.

In April, the first significant structural change, and the most controversial part of the strategy, came to the Council, changing the base zoning of the city to R-CG. There was a vigorous public debate, which resulted in the longest city council meeting in Canadian history. Ultimately, R-CG zoning was passed, and some amendments were made to address what was heard in the public hearings. While far from an ideal solution or a silver bullet, R-CG zoning will increase the overall supply and density of housing in the City of Calgary – two critical pieces of an affordable housing puzzle. What we need to celebrate the most is the high engagement levels from people on all sides of this debate, revealing a vibrant civic life in our city. We especially want to celebrate the engagement of our members and partners in advancing affordable housing in our city.

Recruiting New Member Organizations

Recruiting new member organizations has proven far more challenging and slower than expected. The dominant factor was the challenge of leaders turning their focus to internal organizational challenges. Last year we added Good Shepherd Anglican Church and our first-ever Sponsor Organization, Kensington Commons. An additional ten organizations are actively moving towards membership.

We have also formed a deeper relationship with one of our members, Action Dignity, to create an ethnocultural caucus and a new arrangement to facilitate how ethnocultural organizations can become members. This arrangement is bearing fruit already. Eighteen community connectors participated in our Foundations of Community Organizing Training, and we are working with Action Dignity to train and develop a community organizer to advance this work.

Relational Meetings

A key focus of this past year was reweaving the relational web of our Alliance. The practice of relational meetings was taught in workshops, in our training, and as a part of meetings. A relational meeting team set up meetings between leaders of the Alliance and several of our member organizations, resulting in rich dialogues and a deepening mutual understanding. Our organizers had hundreds of relational

meetings with existing leaders, potential members, and key allies. We have encouraged our leaders to set up relational meetings with each other.

A Councillor Relations and Power Analysis team was set up, and they have had relationship-focused meetings with most of the city council. This was a rich experience that helped us understand their priorities and interests and what we could work on together. This team also began to develop an overall power analysis in our city. This revealed how power is shifting and causing many of the divisions and turmoil we perceive in public life. This has also reinforced the importance of building the power of communities so that their experiences and values will shape our shared future.

Our relational meetings have culminated in our Listening Campaign, which involves hundreds of one-on-one and house meetings. This was officially launched in May and three trainings were provided. We look forward to our Discernment Assembly in September when our new campaigns and who will lead them will be identified.

Leadership Development and Training

Leadership development was a significant focus of this year. Three Foundations of Community Organizing trainings were held, training around sixty people. We hosted four leaders' lunches. With the IAFC, we hosted two workshops, one on the work of reorganizing and a CORE Team 101 session. One person attended our regional training, and five people have expressed interest in attending the National IAF Training. We have also begun to integrate some of this training into our meetings and gatherings.

A major focus of this year has been on identifying new leaders. As part of this, we reorganized the roles and meeting times of our Board and Strategy team. We now have a healthy board and have welcomed Hope Cochrane, Susan Wood, Kent Hehr, and Pat Cashion to the Board this past year. Our Strategy Team is moving its meeting time to the fourth Monday of the month at 7:00 pm. This move will double the size of the Strategy Team and expand the diversity of its members.

Financial Sustainability and Governance

The Board of Directors reviewed our governance structure and identified several areas that needed to be updated or changed. The recommended changes were approved at a Delegates' Assembly in March.

The Alliance needs sufficient and sustainable money to organize people to build community-transforming power.

This year we organized our first-ever Celebration and Fundraising Dinner. We sold out all 200 seats! It was a great relationship-building moment and a powerful reminder of what we can accomplish when we act together together. We raised over $21,000.

We have also begun focusing on grants and have researched and developed a calendar of applications to work on.

We still need to do more work to raise memberships and dues to a level that will sustain our shared organization over the long run.

Staff

We also experienced the consequences of not having adequately organized ‘hard money.’ Renee Kirby’s role as our climate organizer wrapped up when the grant that was paying for her time ended. Elyse Brazil’s work with us as our associate organizer will wrap up at the end of June. We were also saddened when Vincent St.Pierre, our communications and administration coordinator, left for a great, full-time opportunity. We are also gladdened by the addition of Melody Ho, who has now stepped into the role of communication and administration coordinator. Ryan’s health has mostly recovered and has returned to full-time work.

Culture

One of our priorities has been to look at the culture of our Alliance. One aspect of this is to ensure we are well grounded in the wisdom of the community organizing tradition. This is why we have focused on training, including Foundations Training, integrating training into our meetings, and having people attend regional and national training. We have also focused on shifting our culture to be more responsive. This is why we will choose only two shared campaigns to start with after our Listening Campaign. This will ensure we have some reserved capacity for issues as they arise.

We have also focused on decolonizing our work and becoming a more inclusive and diverse Alliance. This was lived out through the World Café process that examined our next steps in decolonization. We also hosted an anti-racism training this past year. Most importantly, we have worked to have people from diverse backgrounds step into leadership positions while working to develop an ethnocultural caucus. As we begin to build the diversity we seek to embody, we will continue this process by

re-examining our culture document to see how we need to reshape the culture we are creating together. We will work to build a culture where people from diverse backgrounds and experiences work together for the Common Good.

The Work Before Us

In May of 2024, we launched our Listening Campaign. This will lead to a Discernment Assembly on September 16, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. at Scarboro United Church. At this Assembly, we will choose the campaigns to shape our future work and form the teams to guide us. Already we are hearing about the great pressures that families, individuals, and communities are under. Those pressures and concerns include unaffordable housing, rising food costs, wages that can't keep up, growing mental health and addiction issues, the environmental crisis, issues around schools, integrating new immigrants into our communities, recognition of credentials, good jobs, building a constructive public life and other issues.

Ultimately, it is up to you, our members, to decide where we will focus our shared power. Over the next year, we will continue our work or build a shared, strong, and diverse Alliance. To do this, we will continue to find and develop new leaders, welcome new organizations, and identify the common threads that hold our lives together.

We look forward to hearing from you about how you will be a part of this shared work for the Common Good.





Elizabeth McLennan – Board Co-Chair.

Aurelio 'Jun' Naraval – BoardCo-Chair



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Ryan Andersen – Lead Organizer