

WIN WITHOUT WAR

‘Closing the Gap Between Vision and Practice’

*UNDERSTANDING EMERGENT STRATEGIES
FOR AUTHENTIC INTERSECTIONAL
ORGANIZING IN THE NUCLEAR ABOLITION
MOVEMENT*

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Executive Summary

The nuclear abolition movement was once at the forefront of anti-nuclear weapons advocacy, building power for the struggle against nuclear armageddon by building deep connections between the movement for freedom from nuclear destruction with other freedom movements. Today, nuclear abolition's position in the world of anti-nuclear weapons activism has weakened, and the movement as a whole has atrophied as a result. With nuclear dangers growing internationally and the overall anti-nuclear weapons movement struggling politically in the United States, it is past time to reverse that trend and re-center nuclear abolition in our work.

Learning from the past and updating effective strategies, as well as implementing new ways of thinking and doing nuclear abolition work, is needed in order to revive and strengthen the current nuclear abolition movement. Returning to an intersectional framework for nuclear abolition is key. The nuclear abolition movement must also return to a central focus of grassroots organizing to revitalize the people power necessary to bring about any sort of meaningful and lasting change when it comes to nuclear weapons or any other societal ill.

These core lessons from the past can be re-introduced to the field through the relatively new concept of emergent strategy. Developed by Black leaders and thinkers in other abolition movements, emergent strategy is “a strategy for building complex patterns and systems of change through relatively small interactions.”¹ It calls for relational movement-building, creating effective networks of mutual accountability, non-linear goal setting, and a focus on shared efforts to imagine a better world. Emergent strategies can help the nuclear abolition movement with the transformation it needs to build the people power imperative to manifesting a world free from nuclear weapons.

This report offers a summary of emergent strategy, and a detailed case for its applicability to this moment in recommendations for funders and organization leaders. It asserts that a first step in supporting the adoption of an emergent strategy framework by the nuclear abolition movement is facilitating opportunities to engage with emergent strategy thought leaders to gain insight on what it means to be an emergent strategist. As well, funders and organization leaders can work to redefine success and its metrics. Visionary organizing is not conducive to the current grant-making structure, which influences how organizations structure their work and how both organizations and funders subsequently measure success. By eliminating the restrictions posed by the current grant-making structure, funders can allow organizations more flexibility to engage in visionary organizing characterized by a non-linear and iterative process.

Introduction

It's no secret that the cause of nuclear abolition is in a tenuous moment. On a global level, the Doomsday Clock continues ticking closer to midnight. We are living in a world of nuclear death, under a system that values genocidal weapons over human life, amassing its power through the death and suffering of the dispossessed – the majority of whom are Black or Indigenous. Nuclear arms control efforts have ground to a halt, as nuclear powers refuse to engage in any action that would reduce their nuclear arsenals, and instead are modernizing and increasing their arsenals, essentially reviving and revamping the nuclear arms race of the Cold War era. Government officials in some nuclear powers like the U.S., Russia, and Israel are making public calls to use nuclear weapons in ongoing wars, sparking global fears of potential nuclear weapons use in the near future.

On a movement level, anti-nuclear experts, activists, and organizers are ill-equipped to face these global challenges. The anti-nuclear weapons movement lacks the political and people power necessary to bring about the change we seek. This is due in part to the makeup of the field – there is a severe intergenerational divide, with tensions between senior and junior figures in the field often running high. Efforts to empower younger advocates have often broken down for lack of consistent support from senior leaders in the field, and many older advocates have dismissed or belittled efforts to bring the movement into the present day. The field's wealthy, white, male-dominant profile has made it difficult or harmful for people of color, impacted communities, and other individuals with marginalized identities to contribute fully to the cause, often – intentionally or unintentionally – pushing them out of the movement and replicating, on a movement level, the systemic oppressions that govern society broadly.

Additionally, the funding structure for the movement is inadequate to meet the needs of the movement. Organizing – the kind of baseline movement building work necessary to build grassroots political power – has been particularly hard hit by recent funding woes. Funders in the space tend to prefer campaigns around arms control and “risk reduction” to organizing sustained, broad-based campaigns for nuclear abolition. All of these factors create the perfect storm for inefficacy, stagnation, and, if nothing changes, the near-complete death of the nuclear abolition movement.

The nuclear abolition movement wasn't always in such crisis. During the Cold War, especially prior to the McCarthy era, the movement was much more vibrant and diverse. The Black liberation, labor, and women's rights movements were all significantly involved in advocating for an end to the U.S.-Soviet arms race and nuclear disarmament. Discussions around nuclear weapons weren't simply about eliminating the weapons themselves, but connecting the nuclear issue to others, highlighting how

nuclear weapons were part and parcel of the white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist systems of oppression that other movements were fighting against. It was a deeply global movement, with organizers and thought leaders traversing the world to meet up, protest, and raise awareness and action around the threat of nuclear weapons.

The strength of the movement, due to its intersectional and international makeup, created an immense collective effort to build grassroots power, within the U.S. and elsewhere, that provided the political influence to actually affect legislative and policy change. To see its effectiveness, one must only look to the (now defunct) Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, a treaty that eliminated an entire class of nuclear weapons and came about only after massive protests in Europe and the U.S. to pressure Presidents Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev to take action on the runaway arms race between the U.S. and Soviet Union.

Unfortunately, with the fall of the Soviet Union and a brief period of cooperation between the U.S. and Russia, grassroots organizing around the abolition of nuclear weapons was pushed to the side and nuclear issues became almost exclusively the concern of the D.C. expert community. Gone were the visionary organizing days, when leaders from different social justice movements worked together to highlight nuclear weapons as the ultimate manifestation of these interconnected systems of oppression dominating society and their abolition as the path toward a just and liberated world.

“Every crisis, actual or impending...[is] an opportunity to bring about profound changes in our society.”

- Grace Lee Boggs
American revolutionary and activist

We are living with the consequences of that shift, but the crisis it has brought on is not a moment to despair about the state of nuclear affairs. The late American revolutionary and activist Grace Lee Boggs staunchly pushed for us as organizers to view “Every crisis, actual or impending...as an opportunity to bring about profound changes in our society.”² And this crisis is an opportunity to profoundly transform the nuclear abolition movement to be authentically intersectional so we can build the meaningful relationships required to accumulate meaningful power.

An intersectional movement doesn’t mean simply one that works alongside experts and organizers from other movements – coalition work is necessary but not sufficient to produce the change we seek. When Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the concept, “intersectionality” referred to the ways that racism and sexism work together to create unique harms for Black women that go beyond the harms they experience through racism or sexism acting alone, and the need for a nuanced understanding of these interlocking injustices in order to realize Black liberation.³ This concept has been expanded over the years to incorporate the ways that people with multiple marginalized identities—be it race, sexuality, gender, ability or class—are harmed by these inextricably linked systems of oppression. Engaging with, and organizing against, nuclear harms as they intersect with other social ills is an opportunity to grow the nu-

clear abolition movement in a durable and just way.

Nuclear weapons don't have to be detonated to cause irreparable harm; their development, production, testing, maintenance, and modernization are harming countless communities across the U.S. and the globe. Our work must center on reducing people's contact with the nuclear weapons industrial complex as much as possible, to prevent the inevitable harms to mind, body, and environment that have been documented since the dawn of the nuclear age. Efforts to divest funds that sustain the nuclear weapons industrial complex, garner support for international diplomatic efforts to ban nuclear weapons, or advocate for governmental assistance for nuclear victims, are all examples of working to reduce contact with, and therefore harms of, the nuclear weapons industrial complex.

Nuclear weapons and their harms do not exist in a vacuum; there is a reason that the victims of radiation exposure as a result of the nuclear weapons system are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, poor, disabled, and so forth. The nuclear system works in tandem with other systems of oppression to protect the white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, ableist, homophobic and transphobic status quo.

The intersectional nature of the nuclear issue means that, while there is no one-size-fits-all solution to apply in our many efforts around the world to dismantle the systems of oppression that provide for the existence and maintenance of nuclear weapons, there are a plethora of paths into thinking about the necessity of nuclear abolition. There are already several organizations, collectives, and individuals radically imagining and practicing a range of new, abolitionist futures. Through their collective theorizing, imagining, and practicing, they have offered new visions and tools to materialize the abolitionist futures we seek to create. One way to characterize that work is through a term popularized in other abolition movements, "emergent strategies."

EMERGENT STRATEGY: *Strategies for creating change via building complex systems through small interactions.*

PRINCIPLES

Small is good, small is all (the large is a reflection of the small).
Change is constant (Be like water).
There is always enough time for the right work.
There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it.
Never a failure, always a lesson.
Trust the people.
Move at the speed of trust. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass. Build the resilience by building the relationships.
Less prep, more presence.
What you pay attention to grows.

ELEMENTS

FRACTAL

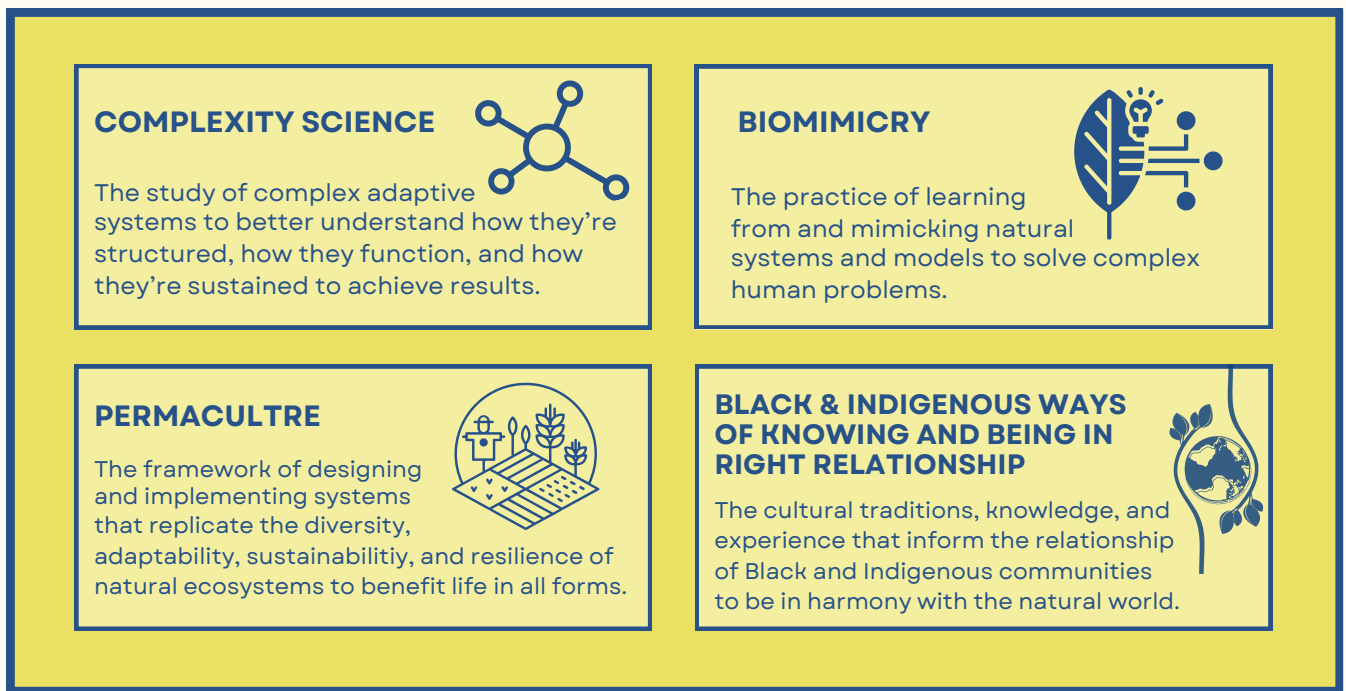
ADAPTIVE

INTER-
DEPENDENCE
AND
DECENTRAL-
IZATION

NONLINEAR
AND
ITERATIVE

RESILIENCE
AND
TRANSFORM-
ATIVE
JUSTICE

CREATING
MORE
POSSIBIL-
ITIES



Emergent Strategy

“How do we create and proliferate a compelling vision of economies and ecologies that center humans and the natural world over the accumulation of material? We embody. We learn. We release the idea of failure, because it’s all data. But first we imagine.”⁴ In answering her own question in her book *Emergent Strategy*, author, activist, and facilitator adrienne maree brown opens a window into the world of emergent strategies. Emergent strategy, according to brown, is “a strategy for building complex patterns and systems of change through relatively small interactions.”⁵ This concept of emergent strategy was born from characterizing the adaptational and relational leadership model often utilized in Black science fiction writer Octavia Butler’s work. Over time, it expanded to encompass a way of being and practicing being in right relationship with people and planet, practices to be implemented at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and movement levels in order to “grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.”⁶ The name can be deceiving because it isn’t a singular strategy per se, but rather a framework for thinking about approaches that could bring about the change we need in order to create just and sustainable futures.

The ideas at the heart of emergent strategies are rooted in complexity science (the science of understanding how complicated systems in nature and society operate), biomimicry, permaculture, and Black and Indigenous ways of knowing and being in right relationship, especially with Mother Nature and Earth. **Complexity science** because we must remind ourselves that all these vast systems of oppression, including the nuclear weapons industrial complex, are at their core a product of countless actions taken by individuals everywhere, every day, in order to maintain these systems, and thus our

actions no matter how small, matter. Biomimicry and permaculture because there are countless life forms found in nature – think mushrooms/mycelium, starlings, dandelions, for instance—that “evolve while maintaining core practices that ensure their survival.”⁷ **Black and Indigenous ways of knowing and being in right relationship**, because as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, renowned Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist, reminds us, “Imperialism and ongoing colonialism have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence, and Indigenous and Black peoples have been building worlds and then rebuilding worlds for as long as we have been in existence. Relentlessly building worlds through unspeakable violence and loss.”⁸ With these foundations, what emerges is:

- a focus on building deep, meaningful relationships that can grow into effective networks;
- being able to recognize with humility when the moment requires intentional adaptation to move and grow with inevitable change;
- understanding the interdependence of all living things and the value this creates to build community and shared power;
- understanding that transformation and growth – of self, community, and movement – are nonlinear, and thus require the wisdom to move with the seasons of change and cultivate adaptive practices to rehearse the world we’re trying to build;
- building resilience and resilient systems of care through a focus on healing and transformative justice, and;
- the freedom and encouragement to radically imagine new futures and all the possibilities they hold, and to live and practice that vision every day until we’ve built the world anew.

“Imperialism and ongoing colonialism have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence, and Indigenous and Black peoples have been building worlds and then rebuilding worlds for as long as we have been in existence. Relentlessly building worlds through unspeakable violence and loss.”

– Leanne Betasamosake Simpson
Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist

This report seeks to illustrate how emergent strategy offers a new approach to authentic and effective intersectional organizing and movement building. It’s incumbent upon us, as policy experts, activists, organizers, and funders, to address the drastic need for new approaches to building a world free from nuclear weapons in an interdependent and interconnected world. It is this author’s hope that this report can spark new, more imaginative conversations about what kind of abolitionist future we seek to create – a future free from the physical, mental, biological, environmental, and societal threats posed by nuclear weapons and the systems of oppression that they reify – and how we can practice that future every day. Emergent strategies encourage uplifting effective work already being done, and this report will discuss current nuclear abolition efforts that are emergent, how we can better support these efforts, and what conditions are necessary to create more opportunities for us to engage in emergent strategies moving forward.

Understanding Emergent Strategy

In order to understand how emergent strategies can help transform the nuclear abolition movement, we first have to look at what makes a strategy emergent. brown's writing gives us a framework for constructing and evaluating approaches to abolition campaigning that go beyond short-term measures of policy success and instead focus on building a broad-based, resilient movement that can wield political power. Using these principles as touchstones, we can bring emergent strategy into the nuclear abolition movement.

Principles and Elements of Emergent Strategies

Emergent strategies are fractal. Fractals are perpetual, complex patterns that are created by replicating a simple process over and over across different scales in an infinite feedback loop.⁹ Complex systems work is fractal; they are the result of individual agents working on a small scale, generating large effects as a result of their local, decentralized efforts. brown reminds us that “small is good, small is all.”¹⁰ Organizing and movement-building is all about small actions, small interactions, that work in tandem to create a larger system of action that will eventually gain the power to bring about the change we are working towards. Reminding ourselves that historic change has happened because of the small actions taken by a lot of people helps us to overcome the inevitable anxiety of trying to attack these vast systems of oppression and create a new world. Central to this focus on the value of the individual is that in order to practice emergent strategy and abolition, we must transform ourselves in order to transform the world.¹¹ If we're to build deep, meaningful relationships, we must ensure we're doing the work on ourselves to not perpetuate the systems of oppression and harm that make up our current world, dividing and alienating us from one another.

Emergent strategies are intentionally adaptive. Change is constant, both in ourselves and in the world. To be stagnant, to refuse to adapt and grow with each new experience and lesson, is to set oneself up for failure, especially in organizing and movement-building. brown describes intentional adaptation as “the process of changing while staying in touch with our deeper purpose and longing,”¹² to tune “into the natural operating systems of this universe and being humbled, as opposed to trying to barrel through and against the change, trying to best nature.”¹³ Change isn't a bad thing; it's simply a necessary part of life that creates spaces for all kinds of growth. When you lean into change rather than resist, it decreases exhaustion and burnout because you aren't constantly fighting a losing battle. And with the constant nature of change, it's important to ensure we aren't wasting our time over-prepping, and instead be more present in the moment, listening to what the moment is asking of us. We miss oppor-

tunities when we attempt to create the perfect strategy that doesn't exist – we aren't fortune tellers who can predict the impact of our actions.

Emergent strategies are interdependent and decentralized. They understand that all life on earth is interconnected, that “your quality of life and your survival are tied to how authentic and generous the connections are between you and the people and place you live with and in.”¹⁴ Building community is central to the work of emergent strategies, undergirded by the understanding that our futures are bound together, and thus collaboration is more beneficial than competition and domination. Found in Boggs' home was a sign that read “Building community is to the collective as spiritual practice is to the individual.”¹⁵ Building community, doing organizing work, requires immense faith – not just in your cause, but in people. Trusting the people you're trying to work and be in community with means “moving at the speed of trust,”¹⁶ focusing on building these deep critical connections over shallow critical mass. This trust allows us to fully lean on each other in the process of transformation, which creates fertile ground for decentralizing our ideas of leadership and decision-making.¹⁷

Emergent strategies are nonlinear and iterative. In our work to transform ourselves and the systems that structure our society, we must always remember that transformation, growth, and healing are not linear processes, but instead occur in “cycles, convergences, explosions.”¹⁸ When we understand that this work is cyclical and therefore iterative, it allows us to move beyond the framework of failure. If an effort or campaign produces challenges and obstacles, it doesn't mean the solution is to abandon them and start over, but rather to be present in the moment, to assess what is



THE FERN

In emergent strategy, the fern represents a form of a **fractal**, how the large is merely a reflection of the small. Fractals illustrate the power of one part to impact the whole system.



THE STARLING

The decentralized and collective flock formation of starlings reflects the **adaptability** at the heart of emergent strategy, allowing a singular bird to change the movement of the entire flock at any given moment and not disrupt the synchronization.



MYCELIUM

Mycelium is the root system that connects each mushroom together and breaks down plant material to detoxify the ecosystem. In emergent strategy, mycelium illustrates the value of **interdependence** and **decentralization** in complex systems.



THE STARFISH

Starfish can lose limbs or fall apart and re-grow each limb with no issue, so long as its core remains intact. Through emergent strategy, we can learn a lot about **resilience**, the power to endure anything with a strong core, from starfish.



SOIL, COMPOST

Through the lens of emergent strategy, soil and compost teach us to embrace a **non-linear** perspective and re-define failure, because everything that comes before is merely data for the next iteration, the next experiment.



WATER

Water is all about **creating new possibilities**, new life. Water has the power to give life, to heal, to replenish. Water creates a way for itself no matter the obstacles, often shaping and re-shaping the world around it.

and isn't working, and what we can learn from this moment. With emergent strategies, there is no such thing as failure – everything is data to learn from for the next experiment. Operating under nonlinear conditions, we can also free ourselves from the pressures of “urgency thinking,” as described by brown. Despite the urgent nature of the crises we face, brown reminds us that “it is urgency thinking (urgent constant unsustainable growth) that got us to this point, and that our potential success lies in doing deep, slow, intentional work.”¹⁹ While this may seem counterintuitive, “there is always time for the right work,” and “what you pay attention to grows.”²⁰ By taking the time, patience, and focus required to be intentional, we become better equipped to observe the things that need to be transformed, both within ourselves and in the world around us, and to take action to bring about that transformation.²¹

“There is such urgency in the multitude of crises we face, it can make it hard to remember that in fact it is urgency thinking (Urgent constant unsustainable growth) that got us to this point, and that our potential success lies in doing deep, slow, intentional work.”

- adrienne maree brown
Author, activist, and facilitator

Emergent strategies are resilient and facilitate transformative justice.

Emergent strategies draw from the resilience observed in the natural systems around us, and encourage us to build up and practice that resilience in our organizing and community building work. Visionary organizing work, imagining and practicing a world that hasn't existed yet, can be exhaustive in many capacities. Resilience is key to ensuring the survival and prosperity of the communities we're building through our visionary organizing. And building up resilience requires engaging in transformative justice, the work to transform the root conditions that make injustice possible.²² We must build up healing and justice practices that are not rooted in punishment and penalization, but rather rooted in the practice of transforming “toxic energy, hurt,

legitimate pain, and conflict into solutions.”²³ When we look to nature, we learn that nothing is disposable, that everything has its place in the world.²⁴ This is the same for people; no one is disposable, no one is beyond saving – we all have a role to play in building the world anew, and through our resilient efforts we will unlock this knowledge. Again, this is work that entails beginning small, working on personal and interpersonal levels to engage in transformative justice, and over time these small actions will shape and mold the collective.

Emergent strategies are creating more possibilities. By offering alternative ways of thinking about and being in the world, engaging with emergent strategies allows us to radically transform and expand our imaginations to envision completely new possibilities for the future. Imagination is vital to visionary organizing work – after all, to paraphrase Black feminist poet Lucille Clifton, we cannot change what we cannot imagine.²⁵ Visionary organizing stems from the very imaginative and creative processes involved in a lot of science fiction writing. brown and writer, organizer, educator, and

spoken word artist Walidah Imarisha assert in their collection *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, that “all organizing is science fiction.” brown explains further in *Emergent Strategy*, writing that “we mean that social justice work is about creating systems of justice and equity in the future, creating conditions that we have never experienced,”²⁶ and that science fiction is merely “a way to practice the future together.”²⁷ Unfortunately, capitalism and colonialism have imprisoned our imaginations within their strict guidelines of who gets to create the world we all live in. “Losing our imagination is a symptom of trauma,” states brown, a symptom that these systems of oppression weaponize to make us continue to believe their lies that no other future is possible.²⁸ For victims of these systems of oppression, namely Black and Indigenous peoples, “Reclaiming the right to dream the future, strengthening the muscle to imagine together...is a revolutionary decolonizing activity.”²⁹ It's past time that we take back control of our destinies, that we cement in our minds, bodies and souls the understanding that we have the power to transform the world we live in, if only we first believe and imagine that we can.



Imagination is the foundation of visionary organizing and abolition. Without the ability to create a new, abundant, just, equitable, caring and sustainable world in our minds, we cannot materialize such a world in reality. We must break the chains of systemic oppression that constrain and colonize our imaginations to visualize and practice a radical new world daily.

Emergent strategy for visionary organizing is rooted in the adaptational and leadership model common in the writings of Black science fiction writer Octavia Butler. Butler often wrote Black female protagonists into her novels, who went on fantastical and intense journeys – even surviving a nuclear apocalypse in her *Lilith's Brood* trilogy – as an engaging mechanism to offer a “visionary exploration of humanity” and “emergent strategies for being better humans,” brown says in *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Along with *Lilith's Brood*, Butler's other popular works *Kindred*, *Parable of the Sower*, and *Parable of the Talents* provide more lessons on emergent strategy and visionary organizing.



Potential Pathways for Implementation

Radical organizing and movement-building efforts are required if the nuclear abolition movement is going to effectively address the severe crises it faces. A decentralized, adaptive, resilient movement is crucial to materialize any change on governmental and interstate levels. The only way to build legitimacy and power for any kind of international arms control or disarmament regime is through people politics – without pressure from the people, those in power have almost no incentive to take action to walk the world back from the brink of nuclear annihilation. Arms control efforts from the Cold War era were so prominent and successful precisely because people around the world refused to let their leaders gleefully turn the world into a nuclear apocalyptic hellscape in pursuit of full spectrum dominance.

Emergent strategies can help the nuclear abolition movement with the transformation it needs to build the people power imperative to manifesting a world free from nuclear weapons. What follows are insights drawn from the emergent strategy approach that the movement can apply to begin transforming itself to better solve today's crisis.

Who leads matters. Decentralization and impacted/feminine leadership with privileged support are both bedrocks of emergent strategies.³⁰ It's important to create space for and listen to the wisdom of impacted communities, those most harmed by systems of oppression. Because of the way these systems benefit a small group – wealthy, white, able-bodied cis hetero men – more often than not, Black and Indigenous peoples are over-represented in these impacted communities. It is these communities that know most intimately how harm manifests, and what it will take to remediate it. They are also deeply familiar with what it feels like to live through an apocalypse, because their world ends every day they wake up under this white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, colonial society.

Within impacted leadership, the voices of women and those that challenge patriarchal notions of power must also be uplifted, because they, along with children, are disproportionately impacted by the harms caused by these systems of oppression. Impacted leadership helps us to practice resilience and transformative justice, as their lived experiences and cultural traditions, values, and practices can act as models for facilitating the resilience, healing, and justice currently missing from the nuclear abolition movement.

As organizers, funders, or anyone in the movement who isn't an impacted individual, it is our role to provide privileged support to the leadership of impacted communities in the pursuit of building the world anew. We must identify our privileges and utilize them to rebalance power in favor of the oppressed. When there are strategy sessions or coali-



How can we restructure our networks to facilitate authentic impacted leadership with privileged support?



How can we build the connections required so we can function smoothly as a collective, and successfully adapt to the changes we will inevitably face?

tion meetings, they should be structured around what will assist us in bringing justice to impacted communities, and how we can utilize organizational and funding resources to support these efforts. Voices of impacted communities should be uplifted and heard often. Unfortunately, what often happens in organizing, and has happened within the nuclear abolition movement, is creating performative and transactional relationships with impacted communities – parading them about publicly to showcase movement organizations’ commitment to DEI, while not providing any opportunities for actual leadership or genuine engagement with the work and then abandoning them when it’s no longer popular or the funding dries up, creating an entirely new set of harms for impacted communities to deal with.

How can we restructure our networks to facilitate authentic impacted leadership with privileged support? Transforming the leadership structure of the movement away from centralized, top-down leadership to decentralized methods of interaction and action guided by impacted leadership will be useful to combat these systems of oppression that weaponize decentralization to maintain their power. We also need to focus on building deep, meaningful connections with impacted communities so that we aren’t replicating the exploitative and oppressive systems causing them the very harm we’re trying to remediate. Those connections will grow through honest communication and real accountability through difficult conversations and efforts to repair harm. Conflict and harm are unavoidable in organizing work; we have all deeply internalized these oppressive ideologies, and as we work to de-program and transform ourselves, so we can build deep relationships and community, sometimes that process will cause harm to those around us. Rather than ignore or dismiss these conflicts, it only serves us to work through the problem so we can facilitate resilient healing and transformative justice practices.

We cannot build a movement without building deep relationships and community. To abolish nuclear weapons will require the power of the people, and we cannot build the power of the people if we are not building deep-rooted relationships, networks, and communities. Abolishing nuclear weapons, abolishing systems of oppression, requires interdependence. The intersectional nature of these systems of oppression, nuclear weapons included, require an intersectional approach to their destruction, therefore requiring the nuclear abolition movement to not just grow in numbers but in network.

We cannot do this alone, not as individuals or as a movement. We also cannot grow a strong, resilient nuclear abolition movement if the relationships between organizers or organizations are fraught or fragile. It's not enough to just acknowledge each other, but to be in intentional and deep alignment with each other.

How can we shift our understanding of leadership from a shallow look at how one might be “inspirational in speech or grand actions,” and instead look at how one “is inspirational in collaborative action, accountability and vulnerability?”³¹ How can we work together so all contributions are valued and taken into account? How can we build the connections required so we can function smoothly as a collective, and successfully adapt to the changes we will inevitably face? There is immense power in the people, power that can only be harnessed through trusted partnerships and community. The majority of organizational and funding focus should be honed in on efforts that seek to build critical connections to help grow the movement and its network.

We need to establish and maintain strong, transparent, and collaborative systems of healing and justice. As mentioned before, the radical transformational work involved in visionary organizing means harm is inevitable. As we work to redress the harms caused by the nuclear system, we will inevitably cause each other harm as we work to decolonize our minds from the systems of oppression we're trying to abolish. To properly address these harms and ultimately succeed as a movement, we must prioritize establishing and maintaining strong, transparent systems of healing and justice. There is no one-size-fits-all system for justice; rather, especially at first, local networks and communities can create the processes for healing and justice that address the root of the problems at hand, and offer non-violent solutions. Everyone at all levels should be involved in creating accountability measures to increase the efficacy of these healing and transformative justice systems. The more people involved in creating these alternative systems, the better our new world will be at supporting everyone, not just a select few. If the movement is actively harmful and not safe for the majority of people wanting to join, it will continue to atrophy until there is no one left to fight for nuclear abolition.

Within the context of the nuclear abolition movement, what reporting and accountability measures, if any, do we have in place for impacted individuals to share the harm they've experienced, whether it's from a fellow organizer, a higher up, a fund-



When a conflict or harm is brought to attention, what solutions do we have that are non-punitive, and seek to grasp the root of the problem rather than offering a short-term option?



How can we ensure our organizing work includes pathways for transformative justice in the pursuit of nuclear abolition?

er, etc.? When a conflict or harm is brought to attention, what solutions do we have that are non-punitive, and seek to grasp the root of the problem rather than offering a short-term option that does nothing to solve the problem? How can we work together with impacted communities to create space for their healing from the inter- and trans-generational harms of radiation exposure? How can we ensure our organizing work includes pathways for transformative justice in the pursuit of nuclear abolition? These are some of the questions to be asking of ourselves and of the movement to prevent

There are enough people out there to support the movement(s) we need, but currently, organizations are pitted against each other to access money (less and less money), rather than creating and investing together to maximize a diversity of resources from money, to people, to spaces, to skills.”

- adrienne maree brown
Author, activist, and facilitator

replicating or perpetuating harm, and to establish fair, transparent methods of accountability and justice when harm does occur.

Funding structures must change to better support visionary organizing work. Current funding structures are simply not conducive to effective visionary organizing, because effective visionary organizing is a long-term process that cannot be easily reduced to numbers and graphs in a grant report. Instead, existing funding structures benefit initiatives focused more on shaping policy rather than building power, policies that subsequently don't have the power backing them to pass and therefore don't actually achieve much by way of transforming the nuclear system.

This is not done maliciously – it's true that in the past, the fear of nuclear annihilation was so singular and so great that people were willing to mobilize around any action to reduce the nuclear threat, allowing anti-nuclear organizations to utilize incrementalism to their benefit. However, that strategy is not adequate for what contemporary nuclear abolition visionary organizing demands of its practitioners; there are several existential crises dominating the attention and energy of people around the world, crises simultaneously exacerbated by and feeding into the nuclear crisis and thus demand of nuclear abolitionists much more radical, intersectional, and inspiring calls to action.

brown points out that, “There are enough people out there to support the movement(s) we need, but currently, organizations are pitted against each other to access money (less and less money), rather than creating and investing together to maximize a diversity of resources from money, to people, to spaces, to skills.”³² Radically transforming organizing in the nuclear abolition movement is going to take lots of time, resources, and funding. But it's necessary work if we're to build the people power needed to create a nuclear weapons-free world. How can we as nuclear abolitionists, in conversation and practice with funders, adapt the funding process away from short-term, incremental thinking towards long-term systemic change, allowing us to adapt our strategies to meet the needs of the current moment? How can we illustrate to funders the inherent attraction and allure of emergent strategies and visionary org-



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How are you changing your mindset and your actions to aid in relationship-building and transformative justice?

anizing, and the many possibilities for action they create?

Self reflection and transformation are necessary parts of visionary organizing work; we must practice the world we are building every day. Most importantly, we need to get into the habit of practicing the abolitionist future we are creating, every day. It is structurally difficult to practice living in a world without nuclear weapons given the fact that the nuclear weapons system manifests its harms on an insidiously invisible level, but it is possible, and vital, to practice living in a world with an effective and inspiring nuclear abolition movement. And how we can practice this future is through the fractal aspects of emergent strategies.

Because our systems are fractal and thus are products of each of us and our actions, we cannot change these systems without changing ourselves. Doing individual work to transform ourselves into right relationship with other movements for social justice, to create a safe environment to work with impacted and marginalized communities is practicing nuclear abolition. Reflect internally on how you may be perpetuating these systems of oppression, how you may be silencing or overpowering the voices and expertise of impacted and marginalized communities. How are you changing your mindset and your actions to aid in relationship-building and transformative justice? What changes can we make to the movement structure/makeup, to funding structures, that are better suited to visionary organizing and long-term change, both of which are necessary to realize a nuclear weapons-free world? Through these reflective and transformative efforts, a better nuclear abolition movement will emerge, one that will be ready to receive the people we are trying to bring into the movement, ready to engage in radical visionary organizing. These small actions carried out daily help shape the world we are building, to help bring us closer to nuclear abolition.

As we engage in the self-transformation, the relationship-building, the healing and transformative justice in our efforts to practice new ways of achieving nuclear abolition, some efforts will inevitably fail. Central to this work is redefining failure on an individual and movement level. Failing, making mistakes, is not inherently bad. Building a new world requires carrying out a million different experiments, allowing us to learn what did and didn't work, trying and trying again to figure out what solutions will lead us to new futures. Patience is a virtue, as there will always be time for the right work. But

we won't know what the right work is unless we allow ourselves to try, fail, and try again. Operating with a non-linear and iterative mindset can free us of the strict boundaries of failure and urgency thinking, and allow us to engage fully in the imaginative process of world-building.

We need to get used to the work of practicing the world we are building, because as award-winning American filmmaker, producer, and writer dream hampton notes, "facilitation becomes governance"³³ in the face of the collapse of these existing oppressive systems. Therefore, Ritchie stresses that "we cannot defer the work of dreaming and practicing new worlds to some imaginary, more visionary people; we need to exercise the discipline of making that work part of our everyday conversations and actions even as we fight the violence of this one."³⁴ All of us – organizers, policy experts, managers, executive directors, funders, etc. – must be engaging together, wherever we are, in the daily practice of abolition, of rehearsing the future we're fighting for while we fight for it. Otherwise, we condemn ourselves and each other to continue allowing these systems of oppression quite literally to destroy everything right before our eyes.

"We cannot defer the work of dreaming and practicing new worlds to some imaginary, more visionary people; we need to exercise the discipline of making that work part of our everyday conversations and actions even as we fight the violence of this one."

– Andrea Ritchie

DOING THE FRACTAL WORK



Reflect internally on how you may be perpetuating systems of oppression, and how your beliefs and actions can align more with relationship-building and transformative justice.



Redefine your relationship with failure. Release the constraints of failure and linear thinking. Everything you do is just data to be used to move you closer to your goal. What's important is that you try.



Practice self reflection and transformation daily. Our systems are reflections of us, and as we change so too will the world around us, including the systems that govern society. We can't build the world anew if we haven't built ourselves anew.

Existing Examples of Emergent Strategies in the Nuclear Abolition Movement

There are already efforts within the nuclear abolition movement utilizing emergent strategies, even if that wasn't their intention. For instance, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) working group and the Nuclear Truth Project are both creating spaces for impacted leadership, and learning from cycles of change to intentionally adapt to what impacted communities need in this moment.

The **RECA working group** consists of organizers and activists from several anti-nuclear organizations and individuals who have been harmed by nuclear testing, mining, and clean up at the hands of the U.S. government. Through their efforts to extend and expand RECA, a program that provides partial compensation to these victims, the working group is slowly transforming organizing in the nuclear abolition movement. While the meetings are facilitated by Union of Concerned Scientists' Senior Outreach Coordinator Lilly Adams, the conversations are often led by impacted individuals. They strategize about what to do to elevate and advance their cause, with organizers helping to fill in the gaps and provide information or support where possible/needed. The group worked tirelessly during summer 2023 to extend and expand RECA by attaching it to the defense budget (because a defense budget is always passed in a war economy), and while the group didn't succeed in this particular effort, the impact of this work is lasting. Through their dozens of lobby meetings with members of Congress or their staff, and sharing their personal traumas from the nuclear system, these impacted individuals, supported by organizers, were able to persuade several key members who had previously opposed any extensions or expansions to RECA. There were multiple press conferences on the Hill where members of Congress stepped aside and let nuclear weapons victims tell their stories and rally support for government accountability and compensation.

Unfortunately, there wasn't enough support within Congress in 2023 to extend RECA, but the RECA working group understood that this was not a failure, nor a time to give up. Advocacy continued, and in early March 2024, a victory arrived in the form of the Senate passing a bill to extend and expand RECA for an additional five years. While the bill still needs House approval at the time of writing this report, and is not as extensive as other RECA bills currently in Congress, this progress illustrates the benefits of thinking and acting in alignment with emergent strategies.

The **Nuclear Truth Project** is another phenomenal ongoing organizing effort steeped in emergent strategies. The Nuclear Truth Project "aims to build support and political will to maintain momentum for our ultimate goal – the total elimination of nuclear weapons

and redress of associated nuclear harms.”³⁵ Much like the RECA working group, the project practices impacted and feminine leadership, with a steering committee composed mostly of Indigenous peoples, impacted community members, people of color, women, and queer people. Together, the project compiled a list of protocols that individuals, organizations and communities can utilize to “stay in right relationship with each other, build respectful, intentional, and two-way or reciprocal relationships.”³⁶



Poster for the Nuclear Truth Project's Protocols for working with affected communities.

The Project has been facilitating meetings between impacted communities from around the world to practice relationship building rooted in transformative justice, and creating resources like the *Talking Protocols* and *Challenging Nuclear Secrecy* reports that illustrate the critical need of impacted leadership and how to avoid further harming these communities when trying to work together.

Another organization that draws on aspects of emergent strategy is the **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)**. ICAN is a relatively decentralized international coalition of organizations and individuals all working to abolish nuclear weapons. While there is broad guidance from a steering group and core international staff, there are ICAN chapters around the world carrying out their own actions to get their state leaders to join the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)**, encourage their local governmental leaders to divest from the nuclear weapons manufacturers, and several other efforts to chip away at the nuclear weapons system. The

campaign provides resources for anyone interested in getting involved in grassroots organizing, digital advocacy, and getting in touch with government leaders to garner support for the TPNW. With the TPNW fully adopted by the UN, ICAN assists in putting together the Meeting of States Parties to ensure States Parties are working to implement the Treaty goals. There are semi-regular campaigner calls that allow for updates on progress, offer new opportunities for engagement, and foster community-building within the campaign. There are countless ways to get involved with ICAN, illustrating the value of a decentralized effort that understands the importance of interdependence, adaptation, and the power of small acts to change the world.

The TPNW itself also implements aspects of emergent strategies. The Treaty regime is somewhat decentralized, as all UN member states are technically supposed to be helping to implement the Treaty nationally and internationally (unfortunately this is not the reality, as nuclear powers and their allies have refused to engage in and actively tried to undermine the Treaty regime). The Treaty is historic in the sense that it is one of four international treaties – alongside the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, the 2006 Convention

on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions – that was crafted with immense inclusion and input from impacted individuals and civil society, and includes provisions on victims assistance in pursuit of humanitarian disarmament.³⁷ The Treaty is visionary in this capacity, allowing supporters and those working on Treaty implementation and universalization to imagine what transformative justice can look like within the UN system, and how we can create new opportunities for achieving justice as we do the work to dismantle the complex nuclear system and deal with its widespread harms. Ultimately, the TPNW can also serve as a vehicle to bridge the two aforementioned crises; it can be a way for the international community to buttress the crumbling NPT regime while also subverting the highly Western-centric structure of the regime to be more equitable, and at the same time – supported heavily by ICAN – generate vast opportunities for visionary grassroots organizing and movement-building.

RECA WORKING GROUP

- **Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA):** U.S. Government program to provide partial compensation and health care to victims of nuclear weapons.
- **RECA Working Group:** National group of impacted communities and non-profit organizers working to extend and expand RECA.
- ***Interdependence and decentralization, adaptation, resilience and transformative justice.***

NUCLEAR TRUTH PROJECT

- Works to build support for abolishing nuclear weapons and remediating associated harms.
- **Project protocols:** The Project established core protocols for the nuclear community to follow when engaging with impacted communities so that their voices are heard and protected.
- ***Interdependence and decentralization, adaptation, resilience and transformative justice.***

ICAN / TPNW

- **ICAN:** International coalition of organizations and individuals working to abolish nuclear weapons.
- **TPNW:** The only international treaty that completely prohibits nuclear weapons. There are currently 70 member states to the Treaty, and 93 signatories.
- ***Interdependence and decentralization, resilience and transformative justice, creating new possibilities.***

Conclusion

During her decades of movement work, Boggs used to constantly ask other organizers, “What time is it on the clock of the world?” The *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*’ Doomsday Clock says it’s 90 seconds to midnight, to the apocalypse. For us nuclear abolitionists and anyone else trying to materialize abolitionist futures – to quote brown one last time – that means it’s “Time to close the gap between vision and practice. Time for those of us who seek justice and liberation to BE just and liberated, to be of this place fully.”

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While the specifics of engaging in the visionary process of and practicing emergent strategy will look different for each person and organization, there are some clear cut first steps one can take to embark on this journey. First is reading *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* by adrienne maree brown to better understand emergent strategy and its role in grassroots organizing in general. The book includes engagement tools to assess your relationship with emergent strategy and more. Reading *Practicing New Worlds: Abolition and Emergent Strategies* by Andrea Ritchie is a useful follow-up to better understand the relationship between emergent strategies and abolition. The *Emergent Strategy* series has several books to learn more about becoming an emergent strategist to enrich learning. Perhaps members of an organization can read the books together and map out how emergent strategies can be implemented in organizational work already underway.

For organization leaders and funders, another way to close the gap between vision and practice beyond education is engaging with emergent strategy thought leaders who have been doing this work for years and who can provide more insight into what it means to practice emergent strategies. An essential aspect of emergent strategy is understanding that there is already such work being done around us, whether that’s in nature or other organizations, communities, or networks, to learn from and adapt those lessons to a specific mission. There is no need to start from scratch when we can reach beyond our usual networks to build new connections with emergent strategists working in other issue areas.

Additionally, leaders and funders can begin to redefine success and reassess its metrics, whether that’s achieving organizational goals or ensuring fundees are completing their grant deliverables. Visionary organizing is not conducive to the current grant-making structure, which in turn influences how organizations structure their work and how both organizations and funders subsequently measure success. Short grant cycles and the desire for quantifying organization success don’t allow for the time needed to build substantial people power, and cannot adequately illustrate progress or success in a succinct graph, chart, or response to a grant report question. By eliminating the restrictions posed by the current grant-making structure, funders can

allow organizations more flexibility to engage in visionary organizing. And when combined with funders and organizational leaders redefining success or failure through the non-linear and iterative elements of emergent strategies, organizations can be more imaginative and expansive in their strategic thinking and planning. Operating with the understanding that everything is merely data to be used to inform future plans and actions eliminates the hindering fear of falling short of arbitrary metrics for success. These are a few starting points for funders and organization leaders to begin engaging with emergent strategies, but by no means is this the summation of their role moving forward as the movement updates to meet the needs of the time.

For the nuclear abolition movement, it is long past time to practice and to embody the justice and liberation we seek through a nuclear weapons-free world. Current methods of achieving these means are falling drastically short, necessitating the openness and willingness to try new approaches. Emergent strategies offer effective frameworks for these new approaches through transforming ourselves to transform the movement, thus transforming our work to better meet the needs of the present crises and to make way for us to practice building a new world together. Abolishing nuclear weapons will require the dedication and energy of all of us, and therefore the efficacy of emergent strategies rests upon all of our dedication and energy to implement these ideas and tools, daily.

This will not be easy, nor will it be quick. We must get comfortable with discomfort, with patience, with the understanding that we likely will not bear the fruits of our labor in our lifetimes, but we persist nonetheless. As Maya Schenwar reminds us in the foreword of *Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care*, “becoming radical isn’t an impulsive dalliance. It’s a leap toward allowing yourself to believe in the possibility of our collective survival – and to believe that even if we don’t make it, we are all still worth fighting for, to the last breath.”

This report asks you to take that radical leap, to wholeheartedly believe that we can and will build a new world, free from the oppressive systems that dictate society, and free from nuclear weapons that uplift and perpetuate these oppressive systems. There is no need to start from scratch; there are efforts already underway that are practicing emergent strategies for a radical new future, and it is imperative that we support these current efforts while immersing ourselves in the imaginative and transformative process to create even more possibilities for a better tomorrow. A new world is possible. A new world is on its way. What that world looks like is up to us. Let us lean into the radically transformative and visionary work of emergent strategies so that this new world is abundant in justice, liberation, sustainability, love, joy, and freedom.

“Becoming radical isn’t an impulsive dalliance. It’s a leap toward allowing yourself to believe in the possibility of our collective survival—and to believe that even if we don’t make it, we are all still worth fighting for, to the last breath.”

- Maya Schenwar,
Writer, Editor, Journalist, Organizer

End Notes

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