

Sustainer Learning Circle

Hosted by the **Resource Organizing Project** at the Movement Sustainability Commons

Contact Liza at Liza@resourceorganizingproject.org

Overview

What is a Sustainer Learning Circle?

Sustainer Learning Circle (SLC) is a twelve month circle comprising four grassroots organizations who are committed to leveling up their monthly donor programs. SLC members meet together to build community, learn and share best practices, develop a unique sustainer strategy, and support each other to implement the plan. Each organization gains access to a matching fund to incorporate into their strategy. The circle is facilitated by a grassroots fundraising coach with experience building successful sustainer programs.

Why focus on monthly donor programs?

There are one-time donors, and then there are sustainers (monthly donors). Sustainers give more and for longer, their contribution can be relied on, and they are more likely to engage in the organization's work beyond the gift. In recent years, online giving platforms have made it far easier for small organizations to maintain monthly donor programs, and a growing number of donors prefer it. A solid sustainer program will increase a small organization's resources, independence and sustainability.

Testimony from our 2019-2020 Pilot Sustainer Learning Circle with Providence Youth Student Movement, Resist, Southern Maine Workers Center, and Student Immigrant Movement:

This was a great process for us to be involved in. I'm appreciative of all the collective expertise. It was helpful to have the accountability of a group to move this work forward.

With the economic impacts right now, it's more than necessary to be sustained by the people rather than solely foundations.

This circle helped me put an organizer's lens on fundraising.

Most of all we benefited from the community. Being able to talk with groups about fundraising challenges, groups who also believe in abolition--that's a first.

SLC helped me understand how to use donor data and translate it for my board, staff and youth.

Knowing there were matching funds made it feel like whatever investment we could make would be worth it.

Transactional versus transformative. Solidarity versus charity. We are building more than just donations.

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What to expect from participating in an SLC?

- **Six sessions** over nine months, 1.5-2 hours per session
- **Coaching** sessions with circle facilitators
- **2-3 designated participants** from each org (staff, board or member-leaders welcome)
- **Matching funds** to support your recruitment of new sustainers
- **Organizational stipend** to cover staff capacity dedicated to the circle
- **Guidance on developing your sustainer program plan** to include giving infrastructure, community building, recruitment and retention of sustainers
- **Community, encouragement, and connection** with other grassroots fundraisers

Who is a good fit to participate?

- Organizations with
 - excitement about shifting non-profit fundraising paradigms to build power, movement and sustainability
 - staff or member capacity to participate in a monthly conversation and do planning and implementation in between
 - small (5-20 monthly donors) or medium (20-60 monthly donors) sized sustainer program who are motivated to build the program to the next level
- We want to prioritize Sustainer Learning Circles for groups who are based in New England with leadership from historically exploited communities, building power through community organizing, and with a current budget between \$50-\$500K.

What does it cost to participate?

Participating organizations do not pay to participate in SLC. Instead, they receive a stipend to honor the capacity and experience they commit to the circle and a matching fund to use in their sustainer program plan.

How is it funded?

We seek to pair interested organizations with funding partners who want to support the organization's long term sustainability through grassroots fundraising. An investment made for an organization to participate in SLC will result in a more than 100% return over a two-year period when sustainer program plans are implemented. The cost per organization averages \$10,000, which includes the following:

Matching funds: \$5,000 (range: \$3,000 to \$10,000)

Stipend for participation: \$2,000

Coordination, facilitation and coaching: \$3,000

How do we get involved?

We hope to launch new SLCs between September 2020 and January 2021. If you would like to discuss participation or funding for an upcoming SLC, please reach out!