Thank you to IDEA Storytellers, organizers, board, and allies for contributing stories, insight, and analysis to this Learning Report.
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Introduction

As a Reggio Emilia teacher makes visible the learning and conversations she sees unfolding in an early childhood classroom, this Learning Report is an invitation into the documentation, stories, and learning coming from the experiences of the IDEA Community over the past several months. Our first audience is those engaged with IDEA, with the hope that our learning is also useful for individuals, communities, organizations, and policy-makers around the United States and Puerto Rico working to advance meaningful learning to build a more just and sustainable society.

The report is divided into three sections. The first section looks at IDEA’s contribution to educational change, the second focuses on the strategies we pursue and our successes and challenges within those strategies, and the final section considers the organizational practices that guide IDEA’s work.

What is IDEA’s contribution?

For this report, we’ve organized IDEA’s contributions toward change through the lens of a framework that emerged from conversations with organizers, board, and staff members over the last year.

Contribution vs. Attribution

We do not seek to claim or attribute successes solely to the work of IDEA. Our work lives within an existing and dynamic web of relationships, networks, and actions that has been pushing for change for many years. In that light, it’s important to understand how the work of IDEA contributes to impact and changes that take place in schools and communities.

The Four Drivers of Change framework was used as a central organizing element in the launch of the first Learning Breakthrough Series. Here, we’ve grouped the changes we’re seeing into the drivers of:

1. Policy
2. Public narrative
3. Practice
4. Strategy

While actions along these drivers are often interconnected, for this report we’ve chosen to look at them in turn.
Driver #1: Policy

Policy reflects social agreements that are shared among people with power and influence to create and shape legal and organizational agreements that are often referred to as “the system,” “the law,” or just “it’s our policy.” Policy is not just the legal structures that exist but how they are lived, interpreted, and created within different contexts. Who makes policy? Who influences policy? Who resists or ignores policy? Who benefits from policy? And who is impacted by policy? Each of these questions point to questions of power, ownership, and the real life experiences of young people, educators and communities.

Policy and policy-makers are often out of the general public’s view or understanding. The Frameworks Institute has helped illuminate the extent to which the systems and structures that shape the realities of students and educators is out of sight and out of mind.

Nationally, conversations about policy in the media have mostly focused on Common Core State Standards (CCSS) roll-outs and Common Core resistance from both the left and the right. Several IDEA organizers held meetings or events in their local communities simply trying to help their communities unwind where Common Core came from and how to think about it. Here’s some of the best resources compiled in this effort so far, many raised through dialogue on IDEA’s Facebook pages:

• “An Uncommon Conversation on the Common Core” - IDEA blog post taken from Facebook conversations, including some of the key critiques and questions within the IDEA community about the Common Core.

• Rethinking Schools editorial, “The Trouble with the Common Core” outlines some of the major concerns, including the corporate and political influence, the lack of teacher or student involvement in the creation of the standards, the problematic nature of creating high-stakes tests based on the standards, and more.

• “Fight for the Soul of the Common Core” - IDEA Blog guest post by Susan Sandler, making the case that we have the power to make the Common Core about liberation if we step up and work hard to use it for those purposes.

• U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s response to the critiques of Common Core.

• Dr. Pedro Noguerra speaks about the practical challenges of implementation CCSS beyond any position.

IDEA staff and organizers also spent time at camp and beyond thinking about issues of policy and learning about the history and current state of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act).

• IDEA Camp Goes to the Movies - clips watched and discussed at IDEA Camp 2013

• Policy Driver video - compiled for the Learning Breakthrough Series

Gathering stories

The simplified Story Journal is the main way in which organizers and the broad community share stories of change. Additional stories were tracked through email and phone conversations and surfaced during staff calls that look deeply at the strategies and practices we are pursuing.
• **Network Learning Call about ESEA** - held January 22 with panelists Maya Rockeymoore, Ana Helvia Quintero, and Le Roy Shingoitewa. Follow the link for full notes and check out the Storify of the twitter chat held simultaneously.

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**Network Learning Call**  
**January 22nd**  
6:30pm EST/5:30pm CST/4:30pm MST/ 3:30pm PST/ 7:30 pm Boricua

“The history of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and ESEA from the perspective of historically marginalized communities.”

This dialogue has raised important questions about federal education policy and the role of IDEA and IDEA organizers in engaging with it. Some key learnings and dialogue include:

“I’ve been doing work in education for 12 years in Puerto Rico, and I’ve never had any understanding, it seems, of the larger framework that we are playing on. This is all very interesting.” --- Josué McGrath Rosario

“I’ve never heard anyone ask about the purpose of education.” --- from IDEA Camp

“As a principal I allowed teachers to be risk takers. I believe every child is different, they all have different ways they learn. Some dream, some work with their hands. Policies are ok, but we have to, as educators, find ways to bend those policies a little so we head in the right direction and meet those goals. I believe that policies are made to be broken once in a while.” --- Le Roy Shingoitewa

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At local levels, IDEA has been more directly engaged in small ways at moving or supporting pieces of legislation, making ties with elected officials, or holding workshops that support values-aligned policy implementation. This includes:

- The Minnesota Team supporting and working with David Bly, a team member and state representative, in advocating for legislation supporting multiple pathways for graduation and multiple measures for assessment. (Read more in the Story Journal).

- The Jackson team cheered on as friend, new team member, and long-time youth advocate Jed Oppenheim was selected by the late Mayor Chokwe Lumumba for the Jackson Public School Board. (Read the Story Journal and Jackson Storyteller Chuck Patterson’s blog post).

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IDEA Jackson Team member Jed Oppenheim getting sworn in as a Jackson Public Schools Board Member on Jan. 7, 2014
In Vermont, Jason Cushner is being supported by the IDEA team and staff to run a Proficiency Based Graduation Requirement work-day during which educators use the Consultancy Protocol of SRI to share and refine their classroom and school practices. This is of particular policy interest because of Vermont’s passage of a new law requiring all students in the state to have Personalized Learning Plans by 2017.

Chuck and Jackson-area friend and colleague Shawna Davie played roles in supporting a community-driven idea that came out of the “Can I Kick It” Youth Media Institute - to replace the state testing system with the ACT - to be brought to the desk of the Mississippi Governor, Phil Bryant. (Read the Story Journal and an article covering this development).

One policy story that has an IDEA connection is continuing to unfold in New York. The “NYC Education Justice Team” participating in the Learning Breakthrough Series are members of two powerful city coalitions, the Coalition for Educational Justice and the Urban Youth Collaborative. Both were central to the successful campaign of Bill De Blasio for Mayor of New York City. For years they have been leading and outspoken advocates for education policy and practice in NYC that supports equity in education and raises up the voices of youth and parents. Now they are in a new position of being inside the “halls of power” with real influence and the need to move with different strategies.

Portia Armstrong, of CEJ, related a sense of this during an LBS team call:

> When we left Jackson, we didn’t yet have our new Mayor. One of our strategies (I would like to brag about, a success) was to get a progressive forward-thinking candidate in! We wanted the mayor to use our criterion to choose the Education Chancellor, and many of us are excited about the pick, Carmen Fariña - another big win. We have really gotten into that Mayoral second circle we talked about as part of our action in Jackson -- we have parents and others who work with our organization who are sitting on the NYC PEP - Panel for Educational Policy. I’m excited about that - we’d go to meetings in the past and it didn’t matter if we packed them until 3am. But now we have a voice in education policy.

Idalmi Acosta, with UYC, continues:

> We spent a lot of time providing strategy and organizing on the ground, providing policy recommendations, to be in the position we are in now. That parents and youth need to be at forefront of education change, that we have a shared platform. The work of CEJ on community schools and UYC on college access and decriminalizing our schools -- this is being brought out by press, administration. We’re able to shift the city in the ways we’ve been hoping for in the past 12 years. Lots of work over the years by many people and groups and organizations.

As Idalmi says, this took lots of work over many years, yet it has now led to many of the movement’s leaders being in positions of power and influence in New York City.

This story from New York, along with the other stories related above, are lessons in the value of long-term investment in advocacy and relationship-building for creating the conditions to have real influence in policy change. And that, while engaging in resistance and the bending of unjust policies (as Le Roy Shingoitewa described) is essential, there is also a need to define and plan for what comes next and what policies and practices we support so that we are ready when we enter into the “halls of power.”
Driver #2: Public Narrative

Public Narrative is how we talk about education and frame what’s happening. Public narrative has great power in influencing what we think and the practices and policies we determine. Narrative is similar to story and is communicated across a number of platforms including traditional media, social media, as well as all formal and informal places where we converse with others to create our narratives about schools, young people, and learning.

In seeking to impact the public narrative about education and youth, we recognize that many of the voices the public needs to hear are already speaking, they are just not being listened to or welcomed by the media and other sources of power and influence. Our work has been to get those voices heard.

Two examples over the last year show the strongest ways in which we’ve worked to raise up the voices of educators, youth, and communities:

- The “A Year at Mission Hill” campaign
- The Spring 2014 YES! Magazine issue

While the “A Year at Mission Hill” campaign was most active last year when episodes of the film were being released between January and June of 2013, the campaign has had a lasting impact as a powerful narrative of what schools and learning can be when teachers, students, parents, and the community come together to help each student learn about the world around them and grow in their unique ways.

As opposed to campaigns where groups sign on to a statement or forward on a resource, the #YearatMH campaign gave any group that wanted to be a partner full access to the back-end resources pages on the website and support to share the campaign with their network using whatever resources and messages made sense to their work. This open-source and empowering approach to partnering led to a network of 58 partners that crossed schools, non-profit organizations, foundations, community-based groups, and the unions, including Ashoka, FairTest, the National Urban Alliance, the AFT, and the Education for Liberation Network.

Our report of the Mission Hill campaign offers views, quotes, and an analysis of the impact of the campaign, and this blog post offers a chapter and blog summary, both of which were shared widely on Facebook and by partnering organizations in Fall 2013.
The Institute for Democratic Education in America

[The Year at Mission Hill campaign] gave people, both educators and especially non-educators, a look inside the life of a school that showed the possibilities and realities of quality education. I shared the series widely, and most people I discussed it with were astounded, as in "Wow, we could never have something like that here, could we?"

- Renee Moore, professor at Mississippi Delta Community College and Board member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

For SRI, [the Year at Mission Hill campaign] gave us another avenue of reaching out to our membership to discuss issues in education that are important. It also allowed us to align with other like-minded organizations around a common topic.

- Kari Thierer, School Reform Initiative

The impact continues well after the active campaign finished. During a conference call in January 2014 planning the North Dakota Study Group’s annual meeting, one of the planners suggested that NDSG screen “A Year at Mission Hill,” mentioning that the series was “the most powerful current tool to make the case for the kinds of pedagogy NDSG supports.” (Read more in this Story Journal).

The Spring 2014 issue of YES! Magazine is entitled Education Uprising: The New Rebels Taking Back Our Public Schools. Relationships that Melia Dicker built over the years with YES! Magazine Education Outreach Manager Jing Fong (including Melia’s own Reschool Yourself project being featured in a previous YES! issue), as well as Jing’s participation and appreciation of IDEC 2013 in Colorado, led to the magazine approaching IDEA as well as Rethinking Schools to help craft their education issue.

Scott Nine, Bill Bigelow from Rethinking Schools, Jing Fong, and Sarah van Gelder (Executive Editor of YES! Magazine) worked together to frame the issue in the context of a rising movement of youth, educators, parents, and others working to change the narrative and practice from high-stakes testing and privatization:

Our schools can change. The unsung heroes featured in this issue show how our public schools can be places where young people become the leaders and self-actualized citizens of a better world.

– YES! Magazine issue #69

With articles by Lennon Flowers and David Sobel and coverage of restorative justice and ethnic studies programs, this issue is a powerful addition to the education dialogue by profiling work going on around the country to bring meaningful learning to young people.

In addition to raising up the voices of those not being heard, members of IDEA’s community have also been speaking out and influencing the public narrative. Here are a few examples:

• Darcy Bedortha’s blog post in January on Anthony Cody’s EdWeek Blog sharing about her challenging experience working with a K-12 Inc. virtual charter school. The post went viral - shared over 4,000 times on Facebook, and multiple bloggers wrote about the story. Darcy has since been an invited speaker at the Network for Public Education conference in March and asked to meet with a documentary filmmaker about a film project on virtual education.
• National team member Sabrina Stevens’ appearance on "All In with Chris Hayes" in December 2013 for a segment on interpreting the recent PISA scores. Sabrina’s comments clearly hit a nerve, as she got push-back from bloggers, and it was a good lead into the launch of the organization she now runs, Integrity in Education.

• The AERA (American Educational Research Association) Educational Change SIG interview of Scott Nine for its “Lead the Change” series in December 2013, sharing his and IDEA’s framing of the education landscape and the opportunities for change moving forward.

• National team member Nancy Flanagan’s post on her EdWeek Teacher in a Strange Land blog entitled “The Purpose-Driven Education” about the lack of and need for a conversation about the purpose of education. Nancy shared that it was inspired by early planning documents for the We Authorize campaign, which she said, “made me more excited than I’ve been in a long, long time about a genuine reform campaign.”

• The Public Narrative video created for LBS Session A, with clips of Marshall Ganz on the narrative power of framing and emotion, Chimamanda Adichie’s TEDtalk on the danger of a single story, and Sam Chaltain on how people create narratives out of our experiences and the information we see and hear.

Putting this all together, two broad avenues through which the IDEA community has impacted the narrative become clear:

1. Raising up others’ voices
2. IDEA community members speaking out

Embedded within both is the importance of relationship-building in getting to a place in which it becomes possible to impact the public narrative - be it building relationships with partners for a national campaign, connecting with journalists and media makers, or using the power of our own connections to give narratives a broader platform.

And yet, as the Public Narrative video created for LBS makes clear, beyond relationships we need to also be aware of the social, political, emotional, and experiential forces that impact the kinds of narratives people take in and reflect back through the choices they make. The Frameworks Institute provides one of the more comprehensive looks at how people think about education and which ways to frame the conversation have more potential for impact. This attention to people’s views on education and the impact of narratives will enable us to frame issues in ways that opens people’s minds and emotions to the power and potential of meaningful learning for a more just society.
Driver #3: Education Practice

Practice is what actually happens in real time among educators and learners. Practice is a wide net including K-12 classroom and school practice, teacher education, early childhood, university education, out-of-school learning, youth work, and community programs. Practice is about the interactions among people on the ground in service to learning. It includes the practice of leadership, mentoring, instruction, evaluation, internships, service-learning, and documentation of learning. Good practice is grounded in strong values and authentic relationships with young people.

Tours are one of the key approaches IDEA has used to influence practice by highlighting the bright spots in schools and community programs and providing educators, youth, and community leaders with opportunities to see these sites in action and bring learning back to their work. Here is some of the impact from recent tours:

“I didn’t think I would find original inspiration after 20 years of being a teacher. I thank you for this experience to find more to bring back to my work.” - April 2013 NYC Tour participant

• In Vermont, a group of 31 youth, educators, and community members connected to the Partnership for Change efforts in the Burlington and Winooski school districts traveled to NYC for a custom Innovation Tour in January 2013. This led to new leadership in Vermont’s Partnership for Change and a one-day participant follow-up session in April.

• Vermont Senior Fellow Sarah Bertucci and her team also held a 1-day tour in Vermont in Spring 2013 to show Vermonters some of the powerful programs in their own state. One of the participants was Jen Cirillo of Shelburne Farms, who said that the tour influenced her to get involved with the IDEA Vermont team and to travel with the team to the LBS in Jackson. Other tour participants such as Ryan Morra, are now on the IDEA Vermont team and also assisting in the planning of the upcoming Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements (PBGR Day).

• Colleagues in Vermont’s South Burlington School District heard about the Partnership for Change experience and desired a similar learning opportunity, resulting in a powerful 2014 South Burlington High School (SBHS) NYC tour with IDEA. That tour featured our first collaboration with Eagle Rock Professional Development Center and has led to interest into continued partnership in facilitation and tours between our organizations. Tour participants included South Burlington High School Principal Pat Burke, school board members, teachers, students, and parents, many of whom shared how deeply the tour impacted them and helped them bring ideas back to their school. These tweets show some of the process and impact:

School principal takes notes as HS students share their ideas from today’s NYC school visits. #sbhsnyctour
pic.twitter.com/7gxQMJoS5L

The Innovation NYC tour confirms why I love teaching...even after 34 years in the classroom. #sbhsnyctour
• The Minnesota team’s monthly Saturday morning salons are each held at a different school or youth program, making the salon part tour and part conversation. During the December 2013 salon at the High School for Recording Arts (HSRA) in St. Paul, several youth who participated in the salon were inspired by HSRA to pursue participating in programs or possibly enrolling at the school. Aaron captured the immediate impact on them in this story journal.

Beyond tours, IDEA organizers and allies worked to influence educational practice in their local areas in various ways. Here are a few examples:

• After being personally inspired by Jackson organizer Joecephus “Skipp” Martin at IDEC 2013 and LBS Session A, Aaron Grimm asked Skipp to join his class at Minnesota New Country School in Henderson, MN via web conferencing software, to share his personal stories around music, writing, teaching, and community work. Read more in Aaron’s initial and follow-up story journal.

• IDEA Board member Justo Méndez Arámburu began teaching a course to future educators at the University of Puerto Rico on Alternative Education, sharing his insight and wisdom on youth and education from several decades of experience.

• IDEA Boricua’s first dialogue took place during Justo’s class. German Doin from the film Educación Prohibida, whom many in the IDEA community met at IDEC 2013, skyped in for a dialogue with the students after the class watched the film.

• Jackson storyteller Chuck Patterson has been involved in the formation of SWAGG Academy (Student Warriors Amplifying Gentlemanly Greatness) at Tougaloo College. The SWAGG Academy provides elementary school males opportunities to learn positive lifestyles and enhance their capacity to make healthier choices through community relationship-building and mentorship.

• Also in Jackson, professor Noel Didla of Jackson State University and Albert Sykes co-taught a freshman orientation class at JSU. Their style of co-teaching and mentorship supported the students to get ready for their college career.

• The education practice driver video created for LBS Session A offers a framework for thinking about where practice happens and explores some of the questions about what makes for good learning and leadership.
At the Rowland Foundation annual conference in Vermont in November 2013, student speakers had a powerful impact on the teachers, administrators, and superintendents present. Peter McConville, Vermont Storyteller and a co-designer of the conference, writes about this in a story journal:

[Keynote speaker Dennis] Littky’s keynote was informative in that he spoke of his own journey and how he came to create both the Met and Big Picture schools, but in many ways, the students were the highlight of the show. Two Big Picture South Burlington students spoke about their work, and the poem performed by Cecilia Giordano perfectly encapsulated the power of democratic education.

At the close of the conference, teams of students reported out from a session where they designed (in about an hour and a half) their perfect schools. The themes of relationships and relevance (as hit on repeatedly by Littky) resonated loudly through almost all student presentations. The effect on the 600 gathered educators was not lost.

Peter explained in a call with Dana Bennis that the presence and impact of youth speakers at the Rowland Foundation event did not just occur out of the blue, but was the result of a great deal of effort and collaboration among many people and groups over several years that created a “statewide gestalt supportive of student voice.” Among other things, this gestalt was developed through:

- The work of Helen Beattie and IDEA member organization YATST (Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together)/UP for Learning throughout the state of Vermont in working with students and educators to train and support both groups to collaborate on change efforts.
- Planners of the Rowland event included folks like Peter, Jean Berthiaume, a Vermont principal who hosted an IDEA Tour at his former school Harwood Union High school in 2012, and others who have had experience with YATST.
- Jean’s Rowland fellowship was focused on student voice and was supported by IDEA.
- The Partnership for Change in Burlington and Winooski school districts included a student voice fellowship, and Burlington High School held a seminar about empowering youth to be engaged in school change.
- Young people from YATST and leaders in the Partnership for Change both participated in IDEA Learning Tours in New York City.

Over the course of several years and through strategic work and partnerships among teachers, youth, schools and school leaders, nonprofit and community organizations, and foundations, conditions were created in Vermont that made student voice something that was welcomed and seen as valuable and essential for educational change work.

This leads to an important lesson coming out of efforts to change educational practice. Coordinated efforts to change practice that cut across sectors and stakeholders, and that connect to the other drivers of strategy, narrative, and policy have the deepest impact on practice compared with projects that take a more narrow approach without these connections. This is reflected in the rise of student voice in Vermont, the increasing impact of tours designed for existing groups, and in efforts such as the SWAGG Academy in Jackson, a powerful collaboration among a university, non-profit, youth workers, and local schools.
Driver #4: Strategy

How ideas are moved and navigated among different stakeholders. Distinct from narrative, this is about how stuff actually happens. Powerful change is possible when we not only have good ideas but also know how to move those ideas into action. One part political, one part communications, one part relationships, one part execution - strong attention to this is the work that moves the needle from idea to real implementation and organizational and community movement.

So much of our community’s work is focused here, in thinking and acting strategically about how change efforts move forward.

Here are several examples of how ideas and efforts within the IDEA community have moved forward together, supported one another, and led to increased impact:

• A specific and clear example of the power of connecting place-based organizing teams across different communities is evidenced in the way that “salons,” or community conversations, begun by the Minnesota Team last year as a way to open up dialogue in the community have inspired the Puerto Rico and Oregon Teams to hold salons in their areas as well, adapted to their contexts and needs. Puerto Rico Storyteller Shawn Strader shared about the Puerto Rico Team’s use of salons with university students in this story journal.

• The Learning Breakthrough Series is built on the idea of shared learning among multiple teams working on similar issues within varied settings and contexts. Session A of LBS included several powerful moments for shared and cross team sharing and learning about their educational change efforts. The team provocation rounds gave space for teams to share their draft plans while other teams listened and then had the chance to ask questions and engage in dialogue about the ideas, followed by time for the presenting teams to reflect back and respond. During the final team presentations each team presented while the others wrote their plus and delta responses on post-its they shared back with the presenters. Additional conversations focused on evaluation, drivers of educational change, and focused conversation about community change seen through the context of Jackson, MS provided more opportunities for shared learning. LBS participants shared how important these processes and conversations were for moving their work forward.

• Learning from organizer feedback from previous Camps, IDEA Camp 2013 in Minnesota was planned to focus more on shared learning and conversation. This took place through role-specific dialogues for Storytellers, Senior Fellows, and National team members; structured conversations including racial affinity groups, film-clip inspired discussions, and an examination of IDEA’s mission, vision, and values; and focused dialogue on the Learning Breakthrough Series and the We Authorize campaign.

• National Team calls are a time for building connections across the national landscape. During a January 2013 call while each person was sharing what was on their radar, Ofir Germanic from Minnesota said that he has been thinking a lot about policy involvement in schools, and that in his work with youth and discussions with a principal friend it was becoming more and more common for even minor behavioral issues to be dealt with by the police officers within a school, instead of teachers or youth workers. Keith Catone from Rhode Island responded asking if Ofir is connected with the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, part of the Dignity in Schools campaign and focused on supporting youth of color through advocacy for restorative justice practices and equity in education. They were organizing a Youth Summit and through this National Team call, Ofir was able to learn about the conference and begin connecting the IDEA MN Team with the MMEP community.
One of the foundations of powerful strategy is strategic relationship-building. IDEA held tours in 2012 and 2013 in Vermont and Eugene, Oregon featured **evening community conversations** organized by place-based organizers and IDEA staff, creating a space for dialogue about what, where, and how the community would like to see education going forward.

These events were an outgrowth of the grassroots, place-based organizing activities of the teams over the past couple of years, and the relationships built over time led to participation at both events by school administrators, educators, youth, parents, policy-makers, and community leaders. Supporting the ongoing work of advocates on the ground, these dialogues helped deepen the level of conversation.

Darcy wrote about the Oregon tour and community dialogue in an IDEA blog post. Here’s a quote from her post:

> Thursday evening we returned to Kelly Middle School for a public forum in which students, teachers, parents, grandparents, community members and advocates joined in a rotating fishbowl conversation about education in Oregon. Nearly 100 people were present, and the conversation was intense. Intentionally designed to be an organic group discussion, with hopes to move to a place in which each of us could leave with a commitment to action, we quickly realized that this may be something different.

> Participants commented later on the deep level of hurt that was clearly present in the room, and how that conversation was important for the healing that must take place before we really can move forward. I was touched by how, regardless of the pain and frustration people were feeling, respect remained. Regardless of topics as potentially explosive as racism, poverty and standardized testing, and although tears flowed and voices were strong, the community held a safe and deeply connected space for those who spoke. People listened, people cried, people understood each other a little bit better, and people are asking that the conversation continue.

The conversations in Eugene have continued, with several community meetings following the forum during the tour and ongoing work led by John Lockhart and others.

And here are a few last pieces of contribution to impact within the driver of strategy:

- **Jackson:** Storyteller Chuck Patterson shared his January blog post update about the Jackson team on his own social media networks, receiving many responses from those interested in joining the effort. One journalist wrote offering to help pro bono with grant writing. The Storytellers have made it a point to share out not only their own blog posts but also each others’ posts through their social media networks. These responses to Chuck show what is possible when social media is used as a component of a broad communications and organizing strategy.

- **Jill:** Ruchala had the opportunity to talk with Amanda Rosman from the Boggs Education Center, learning about how the IDEA community gave The James and Grace Lee Boggs School important emotional and financial support at a hard moment in the past year following the Heidelberg Project fires. Amanda said...
they really felt the love and that the school is in session and much stronger now. This is just one example of when the IDEA community provided emotional and community support to each other when people have questions, dilemmas, or are in need.

- The **strategy driver** video created for LBS Session A lays out some of the key challenges and directions for strategic organizing, including clips of Gopal Dayaneni, Seth Godin, and Grace Lee Boggs.

- Crystal Mattison, Noel Didla, and Scott Nine contributed to the framing and planning of the North Dakota Study Gathering 2014 gathering. The theme of “Fight + Build = Transformation?” was provocative for participants. The **reader** for the gathering, its **agenda**, and its **facilitator agenda** are all resources that other organizers and organizations can use in their work.

In looking back at the work of the IDEA community to build strategically, a few themes pop up: the value of social media to move work forward, the importance of shared learning and relationship-building across location and context, and the power of a community to provide emotional support. Embedded in all these themes is the broadly shared strategic goal within the IDEA Community to organize around what is possible and the “bright spots” of what is already happening. As Grace Lee Boggs said in the strategy driver video:

> “You have the opportunity to create something new based on completely different values, but you’re going to have to be thinking about values and not just about abuses.”

While many of our collective efforts also identify abusive practices and policies, our overall focus on positivity and solutions is not happenstance and is one of the elements that distinguishes IDEA’s organizing work.
What strategies are we pursuing and what are we learning?

Our contributions to impact discussed in the previous section are the result of choices the organization has made about which strategies best help us achieve our goals. Our work is grounded in the need to continually assess strategies so as to know when to continue something, shift it up, or change it altogether.

Staff focused on our main organizational strategies during recent calls to clearly identify the strategy, discuss the learning coming from it, and consider what needs to be changed. The aim is to review strategies regularly, at least 2 times a year, so as to give an ongoing check and reflection on our work.

The strategies are divided into the three main areas of IDEA work: Showcasing, Organizing, and Learning.
Showcasing

Showcasing: Tours

What’s the strategy?

Tours - originally called “Innovation Tours” and more recently referred to as “Learning Tours” - are a two-part strategy:

• Showcase powerful examples: highlighting schools and programs outside of schools that demonstrate democratic education in action so as to give inspiration and support to the work of educators, youth, policy-makers, and community leaders.

• Support on-the-ground organizing: planning a tour to rise out of and support the relationship-building, mapping, and overall organizing in a community. The tour functions as a way to convene key community members for conversation and dialogue around what education is and can be.

There are four types of tours we have led or supported in the past several years:

• The two and a half day tour that visits 3-4 sites and is open to up to 30 participants from the broad public. These tours are built by place-based teams with support from staff.

• Similar to A in being a two and a half day tour to 3-4 sites, yet it’s designed for a specific group. Examples include the tours built for the Partnership for Change and for the South Burlington School District. While local organizers may be part of the design team, staff take a larger role in planning these tours.

• The one-day tour that visits 2 sites, is at low cost (or free) and designed for a local community to engage in an experience together. Examples of this are the Vermont team’s one-day tour held in 2013, and, although not built as “tours,” the Minnesota team’s salons that are held once a month at a school or youth program that include a tour and discussion of the host site.

• The consulting approach in which we provide advice and support to other groups or organizations who are wanting to hold a tour. Thus far we have worked with Ashoka Changemaker Schools to support their efforts to plan school tours.

What are we seeing and learning?

Tours continue to be a powerful experience for participants and host sites. Nearly 200 people have participated in an IDEA tour. Our post-tour surveys show that 100% of the 54 respondents would recommend future tours to their colleagues, and that 98% (53 of 54) would be interested in attending another tour.

Tours are heavily documented experiences so as to support participants’ reflection and learning as they return to their sites. Documentation includes group conversations, observations and questions from participants, and links to the twitter feed and other media presence from the tour. This link takes you to an example from the April 2013 NYC Tour.

Kellie Terry-Sepulveda, Executive Director of THE POINT, talking to April 2013 NYC tour participants.
Twitter has emerged as a dynamic and interactive way for tour participants to raise up what they are noticing and learning about during the tour as well as to engage with educators, youth, and interested others throughout the Twittersphere. Check out past twitter conversations stored on Storify from the April 2013 NYC tour, the May 2013 Oregon tour, and the Partnership for Change’s tour to NYC Part 1 and Part 2.

As our focus expanded in the past 12-18 months from staff-created tours, to tours co-held by place-based teams and staff, to tours designed for a specific group, tours have had more impact. This is particularly clear in Vermont where organizing over several years has led to 2 tours designed for specific educational communities in the state as well as a 1-day tour for the local Northern Vermont community.

**What changes are we considering?**

One key question about tours is the extent to which the impact on participants is lasting. Post-tour surveys are taken in the week afterwards, but what is the impact of the tour 6 months or a year later? A long-term post-tour survey could be created and sent to all previous tour participants to gather this information. And, the reality is that tours designed for already existing groups and as part of an ongoing organizing strategy likely have more lasting impact than when participants attend a tour as a one-time experience.

Interestingly, as staff sat with the question of the value of tours and what we might consider changing, it became clear that we all found the tours to be one of the more valuable activities IDEA has pursued - straightforward, accessible to many, and with clear and often quick impact on participants, host sites, and local organizing. In particular, tours designed for an existing community or group have the most impact AND are the only tours that are revenue positive. This leads to the question of whether to focus more on that version of tours and promote it more as an organization.

Zac Chase, one of our National Fellows, raised an idea which would present a fifth type of tour. Annually there are numerous education conferences that take place. The idea would be to connect or link a learning tour to the beginning of these conferences. This would eliminate the included cost of lodging, considering the participants would already be in the location. This is something we are looking into.

**Showcasing: Communications - Website, Social Media, PR**

**What is the strategy?**

In one way of thinking, IDEA itself is a communications strategy. Our values are a communications frame, we put forward a specific vision for what we’d like to see, we have criteria for what we highlight and who we partner with, and we do lots of work around how we talk about IDEA and the educational landscape. The way we try to engage with social media is also about being in real relationship to people - this is a core strategy that is almost in our DNA. So in many ways, we are a communications organization.

The flip side of this is that we lack an actual communications analysis of the type, “Here’s what we want to do. Here’s how we will do it. Here’s where we’re headed.” So in this way, we don’t right now have a clear communications strategy.

What we believe is that communications is about shaping the narrative, and we’d like to develop a clear strategy for how IDEA can support the strengthening of an educational narrative rooted in justice, community ownership, and collaboration.
What are we seeing and learning?

IDEA's website is a mixed bag. We hear often from people who find and love the website, both its content and appearance. However, much of the content and structure is older and in the process of being updated.

In terms of social media, IDEA's Facebook page continues to be our most popular forum for sharing and building the values-focused narrative we support, with over 5,800 likes. Shawn, with the help of Creative Distillery, is experimenting with posting approaches to increase the number of people who see, share, and comment on posts. Twitter is also a popular avenue for spreading our narrative, and IDEA's @goodideafolks handle has 3,200 followers. Staff and storytellers just began using Instagram in the Fall of 2013, and that remains a forum we can access more effectively and frequently.

What changes are we considering?

What's most clear is that the website needs an overhaul, one that syncs with the current strategy of the organization and helps to support our direction forward and the narrative we’re working to share publicly. Our design team at Creative Distillery is now working to make these updates.

One of the areas we have yet to pursue effectively is outreach to traditional media. Last fall we set up a service with Meltwater, software that can enable IDEA Storytellers and others to build relationships with journalists in their local areas. Dana is now working with Meltwater staff to build individual accounts and media lists for storytellers to support their work in sharing stories and shaping the narrative.

Most importantly, though, we need to have a clear communications strategy. To work towards that, we’ve engaged Prichard Communications to do a review of our communications activities, talking to staff, board members, organizers, key allies, and researching comparable organizations. They are submitting their recommendations to the organization at the end of March.
Organizing

Organizing: Place-based organizing

What is the strategy?

We’ve been organizing for four years now. Originally we had organizers more loosely connected. Our initial structure was regional - we wanted to support local organizers and influence practice and policy, and so we thought to start with 1 organizer in each region of the country (according to the U.S. District Courts map). We ended up choosing the best 10 of the applicants, although they did not neatly fit into those 10 districts.

Since that first year IDEA’s organizing efforts have been an extensive learning process in how we can best support the work of existing organizers. Based on ongoing dialogue among organizers and staff, we’ve shifted over the years from 10 loosely connected organizers to 26 organizers spread around the U.S. and Puerto Rico grouped into support teams, to multiple place-based and national teams in 2012-2013.

These changes in structure reflected the needs and wishes of organizers and the learning of staff, including the importance of a team, the value in face-to-face gatherings, and the value of connecting place-based organizing efforts from varying contexts throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Conversations among organizers and staff in Detroit in February 2013 following the North Dakota Study Group gathering, and Big IDEA, team, and 1-1 conversations in the months following, led to the 2013-2014 plans to commit deeply to our existing place-based teams in Vermont, Puerto Rico, Boston, Jackson, Minnesota, and Oregon, and to support the development of place-based “seed” teams in areas where we had relationships and there was action moving forward. Place-based teams are led by a Sr. Fellow and Storyteller and range from a few folks working together to the IDEA MN team which considers the dozens of people who come to their salons as being team members. The seed teams have one person taking a leading role, and the initial seed teams are in Milwaukee and New Orleans.

What are we seeing and learning?

Over the past 2 years, interconnecting place-based and national efforts has become the heart of our strategy. And during that time we can see a growing network of relationships and pathways that have supported the work of organizers around the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Through gatherings including annual IDEA Camps, IDECs in Puerto Rico and Colorado, North Dakota Study Group’s conference in 2013, and IDEA’s Learning Breakthrough Series launch in Jackson in November 2013, as well as ongoing communication through conference calls, emails, and Facebook groups, organizing teams have had their work and forward movement supported by others working for similar goals and values in varying contexts and communities.

IDEA Camp 2013 in Minnesota
The levels of engagement in each place differ based on what relationships and networks existed previously, the capacities of each organizing team, IDEA’s organizational strengths and limits, and the specific context of each place.

At the same time, IDEA has linked with organizations and helped promote work in other geographic locations. The work in New York and Detroit comes to mind first but linkages in Colorado, Washington State, Little Rock, and Chicago also exist. New York may provide the most instructive example:

IDEA’s first actions in New York were the development of staff-led innovations tours that Dana and Jonah shaped giving their history and residency in the city. A place-based team was attempted and while it was obvious there were many groups and organizations who were doing important work to amplify and that there were many opportunities to “connect the dots,” it was also clear that it would take IDEA many years to get close to the kind of connections and work already in place by many other like-minded organizations. Rather than continue to pursue a place-based team, IDEA invited engagement with the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) and Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) in the Learning Breakthrough Series built off macro-level networking Scott had done with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform over the prior two years.

Whether IDEA-generated or linked, what if we conceptualize this kind of weaving as “place-based organizing”? In the same way we think about attention to IDEA-generated events and the events of other networks and organizations, we can apply the same framework state by state, region by region.

In terms of political analysis and moving towards the destination postcard, this provides provocation to think about what geographic locations and what existing networks can be linked with limited resources for the best yield of connections, shared development, and movement traction.

**What changes are we considering?**

**On communication:**

In regards to communication to the teams, it’s essential that Sr. Fellows and Storytellers are supported and that the full team feels connected to the IDEA Community. Crystal recently brought back the Weekly Announcements that are shared both by email and Facebook. Crystal and Dana also had team leadership calls with the Sr. Fellow and Storyteller from each team in January to check in about the teams’ work in connection to the Learning Breakthrough Series. Although we stopped the Big IDEA Calls after low participation last year and because we didn’t want to overwhelm organizers who would be part of Sr. Fellow or Storyteller 1-1s and cohort calls, it could be helpful to restart these conversations.

**On team structures:**

While we have an organizational commitment to the relationships and work of our existing place-based and seed teams, staff have been thinking about the best ways to support and connect local efforts with each other and the national education landscape given financial realities.

On one level there is the idea of an association or partnership relationship in which teams are all volunteer, with either a small travel budget or locally raising funds. On another level there is something akin to a “chapter” model (although that word and it’s “prepackaged” implications don’t hit the right mark), in which teams looking to connect get support from staff to raise a certain set of funds before becoming a team.
Yet another idea is focusing our time and energy supporting the work of existing networks without the label of “IDEA teams.” An example is NEYON (New England Youth Organizing Network), a network of 7 youth organizing groups that joined the LBS.

And given all that, another thought is that we just need to let our given structure continue and give it the time to deepen and strengthen, and that changing now might be premature.

**On fundraising:**

While fundraising was discussed before the year began as part of place-based team efforts, these efforts never got adequately off the ground this year. Difficulties and transitions with our Development Director role have certainly impacted this reality. Depending on what direction the organization takes on organizing structures going forward, it’s important to have clarity for teams regarding expectations around fundraising as well as support to reach the fundraising goals.

**Organizing: National team**

**What is the strategy?**

The national team is a loose group of organizing fellows who help make sense of the national education landscape while also supporting the work of the place-based teams. IDEA’s national and place-based strategies are grounded in the premise that organizing is most impactful when critical connections are made among place-based and national actors through story, dialogue, and collaboration action.

Learning from the difficulties of the 7 partner-specific national teams IDEA had last year, we believed moving to one team that is represented by each partner and has expertise across the four drivers of change would be more effective. The team is co-organized by Crystal, Dana, and Scott and has a Storyteller but not a Senior Fellow. Rather than a team with a clear shared project, the national team functions more as a sense-making and advisory group. The team currently consists of 16 members who are teachers, professors, organizers, college students, and activists.

**What are we seeing and learning?**

The national team has lived out the role described above and has been a strong source of insight and support. At both IDEA Camp and LBS Session A, team members were very present supporting place-based organizers with feedback and perspective from their broad experiences and scope.

> “Having the National Team provokes questions for our local organizers. It helps us think through what this national stuff has to do with our work.” - Ofir Germanic, Minnesota Sr. Fellow and National Team Member

Both at those gatherings and on 1-1 and national team calls, team members have shared their insights on national educational issues and given valuable feedback on projects such as We Authorize and National Mapping.

There has been understandable confusion about the loose yet connected structure of the national team both from staff and national team members, yet in many ways it seems that the team is more cohesive than last year’s national teams.
What changes are we considering?

To clarify the role of this group, staff have discussed the idea of referring to members as National Fellows rather than National Team Members. It respects the important role these individuals play while reflecting the notion of a more loose group.

Also, it could be helpful to have more clear ways for national team members to support and connect to the place-based teams beyond the in-person gatherings at LBS Sessions. We have pointed place-based teams to the National Team Directory, and National team members to the final presentations of place-based teams at Session A. Yet what more can we do? We can ad-hoc connect a national team member to a place-based team when we are aware of experiences the national team member could share to support their work. We'd considered the idea of a national team member traveling to a place-based location once during the LBS, yet that would require additional funds.

A final important dilemma is that since IDEA is connected to those in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, having a “national team” that covers that area does not honor that there are two national histories and identities. How can we change the name or structure to reflect that reality? Do we have U.S. Fellows and Puerto Rico Fellows? Take away the word “national” and refer to the group as “IDEA Fellows”?

Organizing: We Authorize - Generating National Narrative

What is the strategy?

The planning for the We Authorize campaign followed on the heels of the Year at Mission Hill campaign. Feedback from IDEA organizers and campaign partners was that having a national campaign like the Mission Hill film was powerful in sparking conversation and building a narrative for what education is and can be. We Authorize was designed to build from the lessons of that campaign, to further raise up a narrative to combat the pervasive messages around high-stakes accountability, failing schools and teachers, and global competition.

We Authorize aims to define a new course of action for U.S. education policy in the 21st Century – one that helps to make visible the positive educational experiences happening at the grassroots level by raising up the voices of young people, educators and the communities they serve. The campaign is designed to impact the reauthorization of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) by formally presenting the campaign’s findings and urging our elected officials to enact the will of the people. At the same time, the goal goes beyond ESEA towards strengthening local change efforts and building momentum and movement for educational change throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

What are we seeing and learning?

The initial conversations about the campaign found interest in many people - from long-time organizers like Harry Boyte and Karen Murphy, to John Siceloff (PBS and ABC producer, who has agreed to shoot an initial PSA for the campaign), to Civil Rights leaders such as Bob Moses and Dave Dennis, to educators and youth within IDEA and our broader community of allies, including Monty Neill, Sheryl Petty, and more.
We invited over 200 close allies to We Authorize calls during the initial planning period, starting with a smaller group before opening it fully to the public. Initial introductory calls in December brought in over 40 people from various groups and organizations, and participants of coordination and design calls in January began filling in the details beyond the early thinking of the campaign.

The [We Authorize planning site](#) has all the information, notes, and thinking to date.

**What changes are we considering?**

We have not been successful in raising initial funds to support early costs of the campaign, including the development of a PSA and have heard concerns about how the campaign was developing at early stages. In light of that and IDEA’s current financial crunch, we have paused the development of this campaign to reconsider what our capacity is to give leadership to it.
Learning

Learning: Storytelling

What is the strategy?

Storytellers are key members of their organizing teams as both participants and documenters of what’s happening. By raising up local stories alongside national stories of change, storytellers are helping create a public narrative that can contribute to meaningful educational change for young people and communities around the country.

The role of storyteller is an outgrowth of learning and feedback from organizers who have said that while they see the value in sharing stories of what is going on, they don’t have the time to do it. So we created the storyteller role in the summer of 2013 so that the stories from each team can be shared. It’s also an outgrowth of 2 previous years of the digital organizer role.

What are we seeing and learning?

Through the storyteller role, IDEA has grown a more public and community-based voice to tell the stories of what is happening. These stories show up on the IDEA blog, on social media, and in local communities. Place-based teams aren’t as abstract anymore, and their stories can link up with the national dialogue. Storytellers have submitted most of the 20+ story journals we’ve gathered, and the stories from those journals made up the bulk of the first section of this report on the impact we’re seeing from IDEA’s work.

The storyteller role has also built more ownership on the place-based level, spreading out the leadership across teams. This in turn has impacted both culture and capacity of the teams, something that comes from more shared leadership and contribution from someone embedded in the team rather than coming from staff or the Senior Fellow.

What changes are we considering?

The storyteller cohort has had several conversations about supporting their efforts to blog and write story journals. What goes in blogs and story journals can be similar, and one can help feed into the next -- story journals are for telling the internal IDEA community about stories of our contribution to change, while blogs are a public story ready to tell. Going forward, we can make sure these formats are clear and that there is no need to do double work.
Learning: Learning Breakthrough Series

What is the strategy?

The aim of the Learning Breakthrough Series (LBS) is to provide a serious, credible approach for uncovering the powerful experiences and knowledge of communities around the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Pioneered by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement in the health field, IDEA is adapting this deep-dive and action-based research model to education.

IDEA’s initial LBS from 2013-2015 is focused on supporting teams to learn alongside one another about how to give more young people the opportunity for a meaningful education through changes in education policy, practice, the public narrative, and strategy. We chose this broad topic rather than a more narrow one so that we could provide additional support to our existing organizing teams that are already addressing this question, rather than adding a new layer of teams and splitting the attention of the organization.

Much of the impetus for launching the LBS comes from conversations among staff, organizers, and board members over the past couple of years about ongoing impact and contribution, acknowledging that while one-time activities like tours have a role, there is great value in sustained collaboration and conversation.

What are we seeing and learning?

Learning Session A of the Learning Breakthrough Series took place from November 7-11, 2013 in Jackson, Mississippi with 45 participants including 7 local place-based teams and members of IDEA’s National Team. Full documentation from Session A is available here and includes agenda and participant materials, notes from sessions, and team plans and presentations. Here’s a quick link to the Storify capturing tweets and pics from the Session.

Based on responses to the post-tour Learning Session survey, LBS Session A participants largely found the Session to be valuable to their team, to their work, and to themselves as individuals. Participants pointed to the connection to the Jackson team and community as a major highlight and source of learning, especially the time at COFO Civil Rights Education Center.

Pieces of Session A that folks really valued include the team provocation rounds and team sessions, the buddy reflection time, and the historical timeline. Participants gave helpful feedback about several sections that, while important, could have been given more clarity, more depth, and more time, including the evaluation conversation, four drivers, and historical timeline. Several folks wanted more ways to connect and learn about the other teams, and several wanted there to be more time and space for personal reflection and small group dialogue. There were also helpful provocations regarding how we hold group dynamics and handle facilitation in future sessions. One logistical piece that rose up was a want for more communication leading up to the Session about the activities and preparation needed. Full survey analysis from Session A is available here.
From the vantage point of staff, Session A of LBS had the most focus, impact, and shared growth of any IDEA event over the past four years. It helped to create and deepen relationships among organizers and teams, grew an awareness that our work is not happening in isolation, and helped many of the folks there gain a measure of hope in our shared work.

What changes are we considering?

One of the challenges staff did not foresee in designing the Learning Session was the difficulty in being both a local host and participant. While the Jackson team did an amazing job, we hope to provide more structures and approaches to support the local host teams of future Sessions. As we plan for Learning Session B to be held in Puerto Rico, one idea the team came up with is to identify two team members to manage the logistical side of the Session, while 4 others will be active participants. This should alleviate the need for team members to have to think simultaneously about logistics and content, and provide support for both aspects.

As for the content of the learning sessions, we’re working to incorporate feedback from participants saying they want more clarity and depth regarding the four drivers of educational change, more opportunities to learn about the work of the other teams, and more time for personal and small group reflection. We also have a long list of logistical changes we will bring to Session B, from ensuring there are enough food options for everyone’s needs to streamlining the staff and host coordination of logistical tasks. We hope this will create a smoother experience for everyone and we acknowledge the difficulties of these aspects at Session A.

In response to the want from participants for additional readings, preparation, and homework prior to the Session to enable them to go deeper before arriving, staff will be sending out information and materials to teams ahead of time. We’re also working with the Puerto Rico team to gather materials and videos that give background to the history and culture of Puerto Rico.

Learning: Outcome Mapping/Story Mapping

What is the strategy?

Outcome Mapping - what we are externally calling Story Mapping - is the visioning and monitoring tool we use organizationally and with organizing teams to:

• build a vision, identify partners, and monitor changes in key partners over time
• share stories and learning internally and publicly
• identify powerful strategies that schools and communities can adapt to their local context

Our learning about and implementation of Outcome Mapping was inspired by our early work in places like Vermont, where we were supporting a loose network of existing educational change actors and wanted some way to assess our contribution to impact in a way that didn’t take credit for the work that had already taken place. This is the purpose of Outcome Mapping (OM).

Staff and board designed our initial version of OM process as a small team and then took that to our organizers at IDEA Camp 2 years ago. There were mixed results, and we learned the importance of simplifying, not creating extra work for the organizers, and changing how we talk about OM. After very helpful conversations with organizers in Detroit in 2013, staff decided to change the name of our adaptation to “Story
“Mapping” and created the Storyteller role to build the pathways to share the stories of how our work was contributing to change on the ground.

We’ve immersed the OM methodology - without using that term - into the Learning Breakthrough Series team design process, through which teams identify their partners, clarify their strategies, and share stories to track changes over time.

We’ve also begun to share OM with other groups, including Nuestra Escuela in Puerto Rico, a group of educators and organizers in Eugene, Oregon, and with folks in Boston.

What are we seeing and learning?

Outcome Mapping has given us a structure to hold the complexity of information, knowledge, and strategies that we employ. From thinking about who our key partners are, to what kinds of changes we’re looking to cause, to how we’re tracking our progress, there is a coherence to it that comes from how we’ve woven our work through the structure and tools of Outcome Mapping.

While it’s still on the early side to see what will come from this, having each team at LBS go through the adapted Outcome Mapping process at Session A seemed to help teams create more clarity for their action plans by the end of the session. Teams had the opportunity to identify their key partners, consider what strategies they want to pursue to create change, and set their plans into action.

In terms of sharing OM as a methodology, Justo and Josué in Puerto Rico have described the impact of it on their work, as mentioned in the first section of this report.

What changes are we considering?

In our first year of bringing Outcome Mapping into our work we didn’t take organizers and others through the design process - we offered an existing Outcome Mapping structure to use while attempting to explain the approach in depth. Now this year, we are taking organizers and teams through the design process without using any of the jargon. And it’s working a lot better. Understanding is greater and application is far higher through team’s action plans and storytellers’ work to share changes in story journals.

Perhaps the next step is to combine the two - as we continue taking teams through the process, we can begin to talk more about the OM structure itself, as a way to build broader understanding and application of the process in the communities in which we’re working. This could take the form of OM 101 sessions, or other creative ways to introduce these ideas. This understanding also might be an outgrowth of the LBS, as the design structure we’ve taken teams through begins to become more visible and hopefully beneficial to the work of the teams.
What organizational practices support our work?

Behind our contribution to impact and the strategies we use to create impact are the organizational practices that guide our work and help make what we do better. These practices are adapted from the Outcome Mapping\(^1\) community to make sense in our context. Here are the practices, including examples of each in action and what we’ve been learning.

**Practice 1. Prospecting for new ideas, opportunities, and resources**

*Examples of this practice in action*

- Bringing in the [Agile methodology](#) for staff meetings and task management
- Going to Dartmouth to learn from Lisa Johnson about their [Breakthrough Series](#)
- Outreach to Steve Hargadon to use [Blackboard Collaborate](#) for We Authorize Calls
- Searching for ideas for We Authorize by connecting with folks such as Harry Boyte, Karen Murphy, and others.
- Staff members attending the [Coaching for Educational Equity](#) seminar
- Conducting Network Learning Calls to learn from educational leaders about ESEA, and to learn and support the work of the Journey for Justice Alliance.

*What are we learning from this practice*

As an organization we are constantly looking for and implementing new approaches, tools, and ideas. If anything, we often share more new ideas as a staff or through Community Coffee Talk on Facebook than we have time to adequately learn about and consider pursuing.

**Practice 2. Seeking feedback and listening**

*Examples of this practice in action*

- Engaging in reflection and feedback discussion with IDEA organizers, such as at the North Dakota Study Group in Detroit and end-of-the-year conversations.
- Creating and listening to responses from surveys for feedback after events such as Tours, IDEC 2013, and the Learning Breakthrough Series
- Having 1-1 conversations with Sr. Fellows and Storytellers
- Email invitations, 1-1 calls, and open conference calls with dozens of individuals and organizations regarding the visioning and planning of We Authorize

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\(^1\) Adapted from the Outcome Mapping facilitator’s guide, “Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs” (2001) by Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo.
What are we learning from this practice?
By continually seeking feedback and listening, we have gained valuable information that has led to several insights we have incorporated into our work, including:

- The creation of the storyteller role
- Changing the name of IDEA tours from “Innovation Tours” to “Learning Tours”
- Consolidating the multiple national teams of last year to one single national team
- Working towards more national campaigns, which influenced the pursuit of the We Authorize idea.

Practice 3. Strategically engaging people and organizations with power to support our work.

Examples of this practice in action
- IDEA Camp is the annual gathering where we build relational DNA among IDEA organizers and get everyone caught up to speed on key tools and processes.
- Each Place-Based Team’s efforts to engage with community and education leaders in their local areas through meetings, social media, and collaborative activities.
- We shared the documentation from LBS Session A with our key funders (e.g. The NoVo Foundation, The Bay and Paul Foundations, and New Visions Foundation).
- We strategically invited a couple hundred networks and individuals to the early visioning of We Authorize, knowing that the success of the campaign will come when multiple key partners co-own the campaign.
- Crystal, Ofir, and Sharlen Moore (Milwaukee Seed Team Leader) meeting with Milwaukee City Council member.

What are we learning from this practice?
Engaging with our communities is core to the work of IDEA. It is at the heart of our organizing, our communications activities, and the roles of staff and board members. The result of that engagement - including the feedback mentioned in the previous practice - leads to the learning present in this document and to the choices we make as an organization regarding our current and future work. IDEA doesn’t exist without this practice.

It’s important to note that for IDEA, engaging with those who have “power” means far more than traditional sources of power such as foundations and policy-makers. To us, the most powerful voices and influences on our work are communities, youth, educators, and parents - it is especially to them that we are accountable and whose support and collaboration we need to continually work for.
Practice 4. Checking back on prior work with partners

Examples of this practice in action

- Checking back on and deepening our relationships in Vermont, starting from several organizers in 2011 to a place-based team in 2012 through today, with ongoing collaboration with educators, organizations, and key leaders in the state.

- After the #YearatMH campaign, we’ve remained in dialogue with the film-makers (Amy and Tom Valens), and have created and shared a follow up report.

- The IDEA Coffee Talk Facebook group remains a place where former and current organizers can stay in touch, share news, and receive help and feedback.

What are we learning from this practice?

Most of our work is ongoing movement building rather than specific projects, so the idea of checking back with partners is different than organizations that focus on projects with clear beginning and end dates. Still, we could do more to ensure that we stay in touch with those with whom we no longer work. This includes some clear projects like IDEC 2013 and tours.

Practice 5. Sharing your best wisdom with the world.

Examples of this practice in action

- The Learning Breakthrough Series might be the strongest framework we’ve initiated to bring together and make public the shared learning of organizers and key allies.

- Influencing the direction of the YES! Magazine issue on education.

- Representation of IDEA community members at various education conferences (e.g. NDSG, Free Minds Free People, IDEC, Allied Media Conference, National OTL).

- Social media - IDEA Blog, Twitter, Facebook, E-Blasts

- Documents such as the 2013 Strategy Document and the 2013 Learning Report

- A Year at Mission Hill film and resources.

What are we learning from this practice?

Compared with a couple years ago when we first asked this question, we have come a long way. When we say “our” wisdom it is no longer just a couple staff and board, it is now a larger staff, a full group of current and past organizers, an active board, and key allies.

We could think of better ways to compile these examples, perhaps on the website or in creative ways through the Blog or IDEA Library. One fun idea would be to pull together all of the TEDx talks that members of the IDEA Community have given and add them to a playlist on YouTube.
Practice 6. Engaging in organizational reflection

Examples of this practice in action

• Staff engaged in more than 10 hours of reflection and dialogue in December and January on a strategy and organizational review, the learning of which appears in this document.

• Organizers and staff have time for reflection and conversation at gatherings including IDEA Camp, LBS, NDSG, and during end of year calls.

• The IDEA Board engaged in its own broad strategy review at its two recent meetings, leading to greater ownership and clarity from the board on our strategy.

• We’ve built a culture at all events we hold to include time for processing the event with participants and among the facilitators to raise up learning.

What are we learning from this practice?

Reflection is core to our growth, our learning, and our organizational culture. Yet it is also paired with taking action upon those reflections, as described above in terms of ways that we have sought feedback and changed based on what we have heard. We reflect so we can make changes that improve the way we do what we do.
Conclusion

As we continue the work of educational change, each of us may have moments when our individual or collective work seems fluid, intangible, and our impact difficult to pin down. By sharing stories about our contribution to impact, analyzing our strategies, and reporting on our organizational practices, we hope these types of reports provide a renewed sense of clarity and coherence about our progress and impact.

In addition, we hope that by sharing the stories of who and what led to actual changes on the ground, we are ensuring that the successes and learning of the individuals and groups that make up the IDEA community are raised up and made visible, so as to inform our ongoing and future change efforts.