



Shaping the Future

Overview of SEJ

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” --Eleanor Roosevelt

“The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.” --Malcolm X

Imagine if movement groups had a shared vision of the future and a clear sense of their unique role in making that future a reality. Imagine if, in a crisis, there were already plans in place and parts assigned, so that organizations could mobilize quickly and coordinate effectively. Imagine if we thought about the future as if we owned it. SEJ creates the spaces for movement organizations to shape the future together.

The Landscape

The current political climate – an Administration consistently flouting the rule of law, the continued violence of systemic racism, the increasing rise of white nationalism, a global rise of proto-fascist governments, the tremendous economic shockwaves of the pandemic—is turbulent. The need to intentionally plan for, manage, and execute against a dramatically uncertain future is now critical and, perhaps ironically, urgent.

Progressive movement organizations traditionally direct their resources, focus, and talent to their current campaigns, while conservative forces invest much more in long-term, shared infrastructure. In particular, the far-right attacks on basic democratic institutions and on the role of government are the result of many years of investment and planning; durable and simple narratives divide the country on racial, cultural, and regional identities; and policies hung onto that scaffolding. Our side has faced real headwinds in building a countervailing plan.

About Social & Economic Justice Leaders Project (SEJ)

Over the past three years, the Social and Economic Justice Leaders Project (SEJ) has begun to fill a critical capacity gap by introducing shared futures planning to essential movement organizations, enabling them to better prepare for high-impact contingencies. Founded through a collaboration of Color Of Change, Community Change, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Service Employees International Union, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and, most recently, MoveOn, SEJ provides scenario planning methods and

findings to a broad set of movement partners to create a uniquely powerful planning space from which to visualize the future.

The only way to create the future we all deserve is to have a compelling vision--and plan--for that future. At SEJ, we provide the capacity, infrastructure, and facilitation that can support the visioning work our leaders know needs to be done. But, the value that SEJ brings should not be mistaken for just an opportunity for long-term visioning. Our goal is to be provocative, in the best sense of that word, so that we can challenge assumptions and truly catalyze a new way of thinking. We create and insist on a multiple-perspectives environment. We bring together outside thinkers, external stakeholders, and interrelated organizations.

We bring the future into focus by opening the aperture, lengthening the range, and increasing the exposure to inspire new thinking that is bold, innovative, and truly grounded within the context of the full landscape of the future.

Building Movement Muscle for Aligned Strategy

There is no point in having a clear vision for the future if we can't execute against that vision. Our movement is at its best when we find ways to deploy our resources across organizations and across movements in a time of crisis. Too often, we end up playing 'kiddie soccer' with everyone charging down the field after the same ball, rather than playing their positions. This can result in tremendous loss; as strategies go unaligned, resources may be duplicated, gaps left uncovered, or, worse, we may find ourselves working at cross-purposes.

And, it is not just threats we must prepare for. We have only to look at the lack of effective change the last time the Democrats held all three branches of government (2009) to know we must change how we respond to opportunities as well as to challenges.

At SEJ, we work to build the movement 'muscle' so that leaders have experience in thinking collectively, strategizing in alignment, and acting as a coordinated team in the face of external opportunities and threats. We do this by creating opportunities to align around concrete, experiential 'scenarios' that allow participants to build the 'muscle memory' of working together. This kind of capacity can enable our movement as a whole to manage complex and coordinated strategies that can result in success at an unprecedented scale.

To be clear, we are not engaged in building out specific strategies. We are engaged in creating a space for movement leaders to reach a shared understanding of the future landscape and building interrelated relationships and networks so that, when there is a need for aligned action, the movement has the connections, the pathways, and the 'muscle memory' for an effective response.

About the SEJ Model: Futures Creation through Scenario Planning

To build the movement muscle that we need for long-term program design, futures building, and movement coordination, SEJ uses a model called Scenario Planning. Scenarios are stories about how the future might unfold for our organizations, our issues, our nation, and even our world. Importantly, scenarios are not predictions. Rather, they are provocative and plausible stories about diverse ways in which relevant forces outside our organizations might evolve.

Scenario Planning is a process of thinking about, managing for, and practicing responding to change. It is a way of embracing, influencing, and planning for the future so that our leaders might be better prepared for it. Scenario Planning is a powerful tool that tests the mind, challenges belief, stretches the spirit, and at its best, creates new sources of hope.

SEJ has three core outcomes for our work:

- We **build movement muscle** by engaging in experiments with alignment across movement organizations to deepen real working relationships in the face of crisis.
- We **strengthen organizational capacity** by creating experiences in which movement organizations consider and plan for the shifts they need to make to be prepared to meet a range of plausible futures.
- We **provoke and catalyze new thinking** by bringing together external expertise and outside stakeholders to drive innovative ideas about external forces and how we need to be prepared.

The end result is three-fold. One is a movement ecosystem that is ready to pro-actively manage our preparedness to face a crisis and make the decisions in a crisis that further long-term goals and plans. The second is leaders who are interconnected and more able to function as part of a coordinated team during a crisis. And, the third is movement organizations that have fundamentally shifted in how they act internally and with one another, so that they are more consistently placing themselves within the broader organizational and political context in which they operate.

Join Us

We believe we are at a moment of unprecedented peril in our democracy both here at home and around the world. The future is more uncertain now than ever before but there is one thing we do know for sure –the future belongs to those who embrace it, plan for it, and are prepared for it. The very future of our democracy may be at stake.

Join us.