

Engage to Change

From Client Feedback
to Participant Involvement



Engage to Change: Participant Engagement for Nonprofit Service Organizations

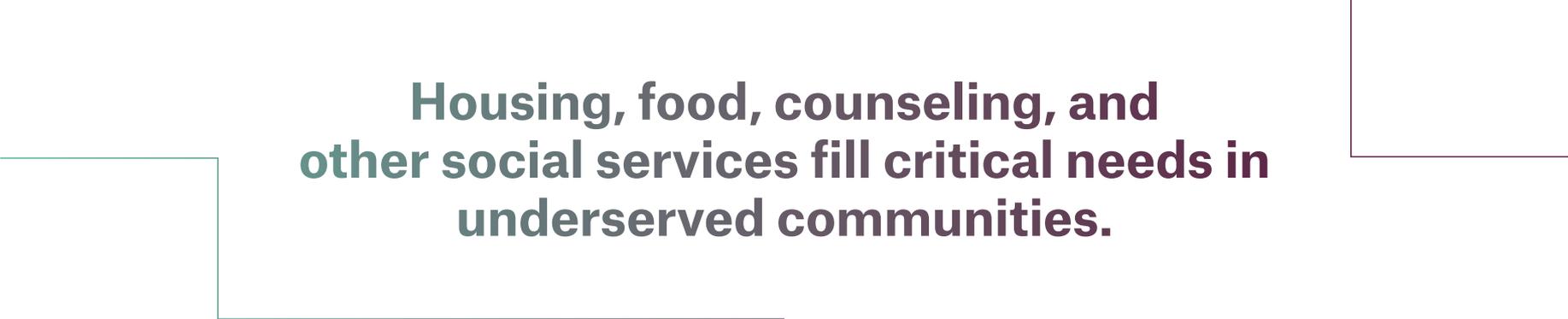
The **New York Foundation (NYF)** and the **Building Movement Project (BMP)** noted several years ago that some nonprofit service groups were changing their relationship with their clients. They were moving away from the common way of seeing people who come to their doors as recipients or beneficiaries of the organization's expertise and services. Instead, this small – but growing – number of groups worked with their program participants as partners in making change in their own lives, the organization, and in the surrounding community. To understand this trend, we convened a series of conversations with a dozen New York City nonprofit service delivery organizations in a “Learning Lab” to discuss the motivation, benefits, and challenges of embracing this different way of engaging clients and community members.

Engage to Change comes out of our Learning Lab discussions and a mapping process to catalogue the varied modes of doing the work. We partnered with the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) and design studio WeShouldDoltAll (WSDIA) in order to create providers and funders concrete examples of why meaningful participant engagement makes a difference. We also include a link to a list of resources that can be helpful for those who want more information.

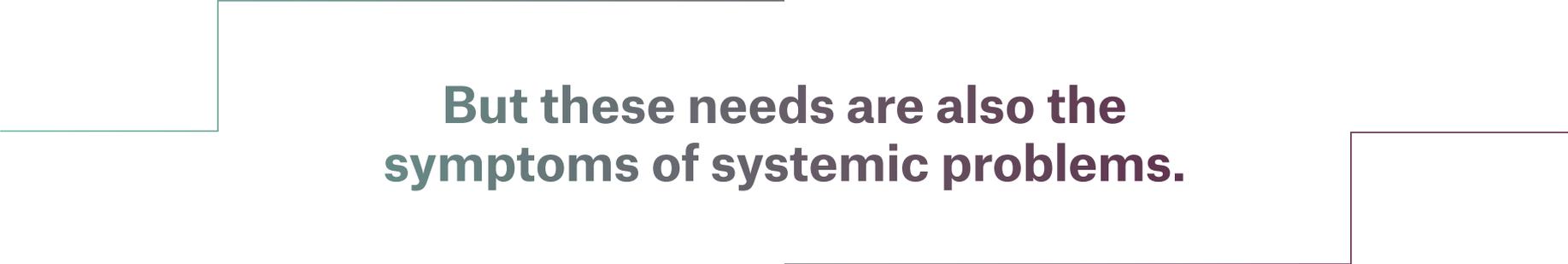
Service organizations are meeting the immediate needs of their constituents and provide essential supports. At the same time, many of these groups recognize how larger policies and procedures can make their job harder and limit options and opportunities of their program participants. With increasing inequality, slashes in public budgets, and greater demand on their services, nonprofits are looking for new ways to do their work. The set of strategies outlined here describes how some service organizations are integrating social change into their everyday work. Supporting the voice of their service recipients helps clients gain a sense of efficacy and gives organizations new ideas and people power for making needed change.

For more than 100 years the **New York Foundation** has been a supporter of community-initiated solutions to solve local problems. Believing that the resilience and vitality of New York City's neighborhoods is its greatest resource, the Foundation supports work that inspires residents to become more informed, active participants in the life of the city.

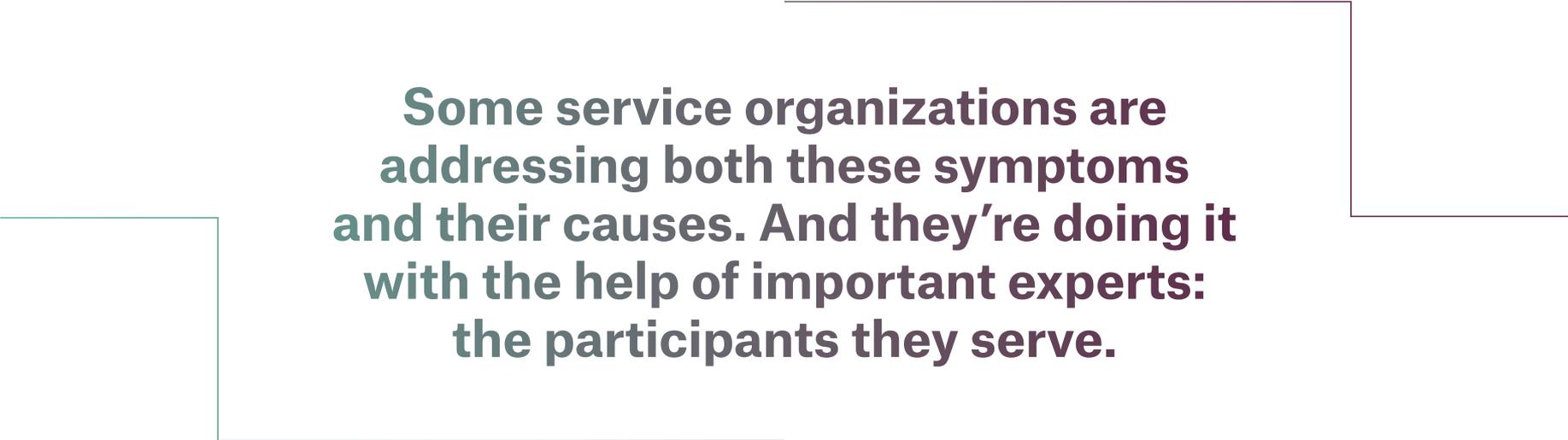
The **Building Movement Project** views nonprofit groups as important players in addressing issues of inequality and helps them build their capacity to engage and support the communities they work with and serve. Building Movement Project has a decade of experience working with nonprofits, especially service providers, on how they can integrate social change practices into their everyday responsibilities.



**Housing, food, counseling, and
other social services fill critical needs in
underserved communities.**



**But these needs are also the
symptoms of systemic problems.**

The text is centered on a white background. It is framed by thin, dark lines that form a large, irregular shape around the text. The lines are composed of horizontal and vertical segments, creating a stepped or stepped-out effect. The text itself is in a bold, dark green font.

Some service organizations are addressing both these symptoms and their causes. And they're doing it with the help of important experts: the participants they serve.

Client feedback vs.
Participant engagement

Client feedback

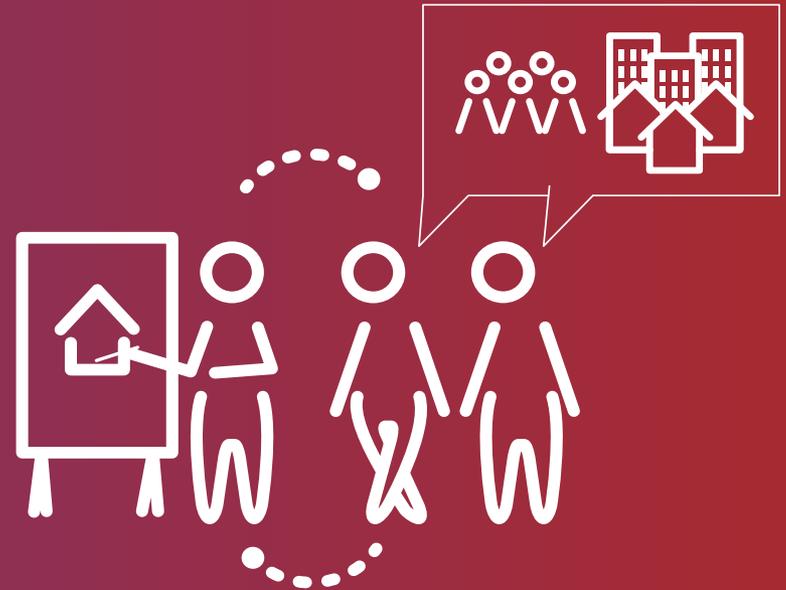
helps organizations get answers to specific questions.

- 1) How would you rate our programs?
- 2) Are they making a difference in your life?



Participant engagement

asks participants for their expertise and engages them as decision makers. This helps ensure they're getting the services they really need, and invites them to be partners in creating social change.



Here are strategies that some service organizations use to integrate social change into their everyday work.

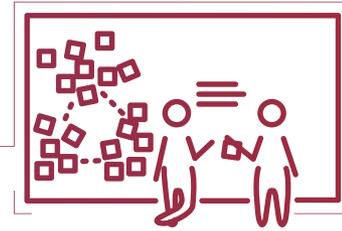
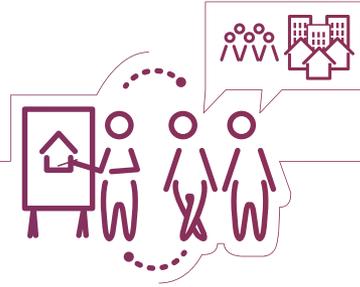
Each organization is different! Size, mission, and capacity shape how different organizations carry out this work. One group may use many of these strategies, and another might focus on one.

Key principles that guide the work:

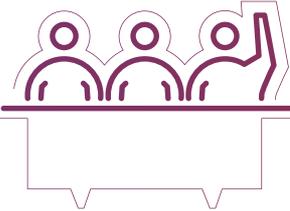
Examples of activities used to achieve them



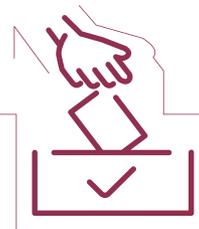
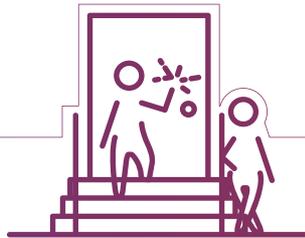
Figure out the systems and structures that need changing



Share power with participants



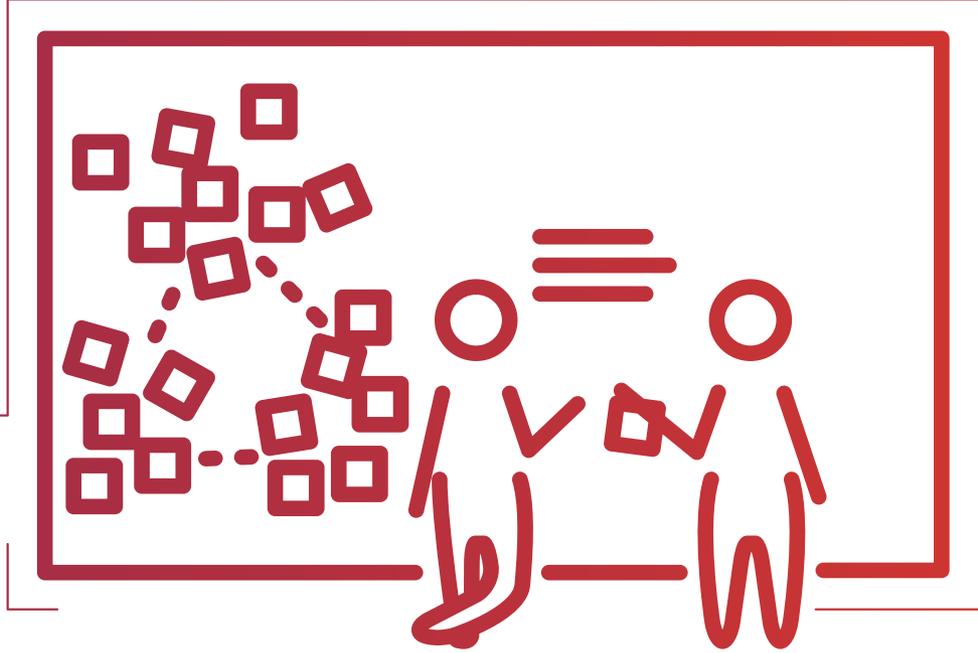
Organize around long-term outcomes



**Figure out the systems
and structures
that need changing**

**Listen to participants,
and identify and prioritize
issues with them**

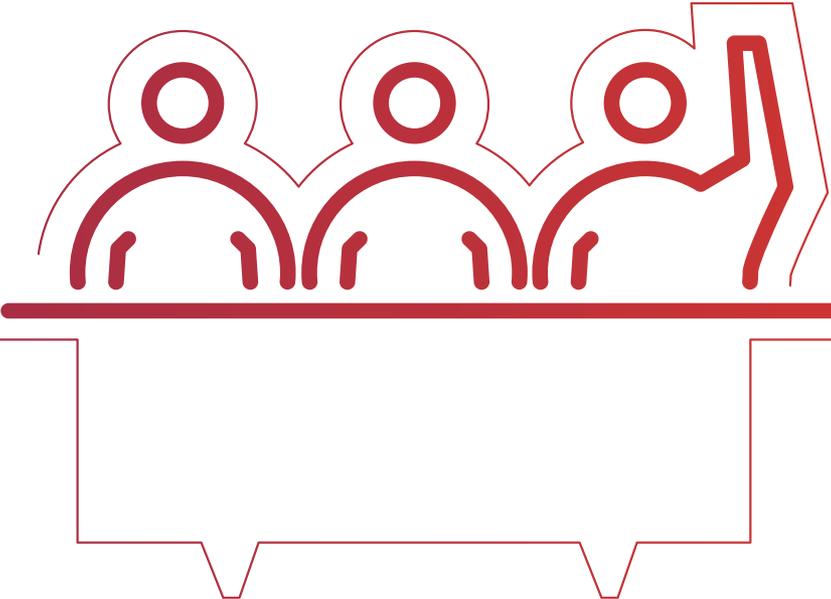




**Host civic
education events**

Share power
with participants

Bring participants onto boards and advisory committees



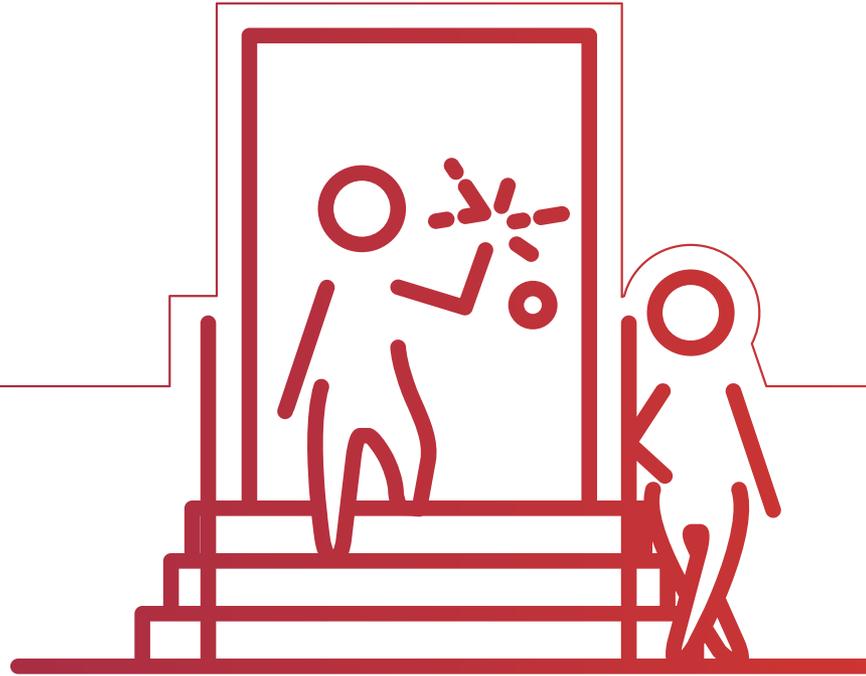


**Train and support participants as leaders
within the organization**

Create pathways for participants to become staff members

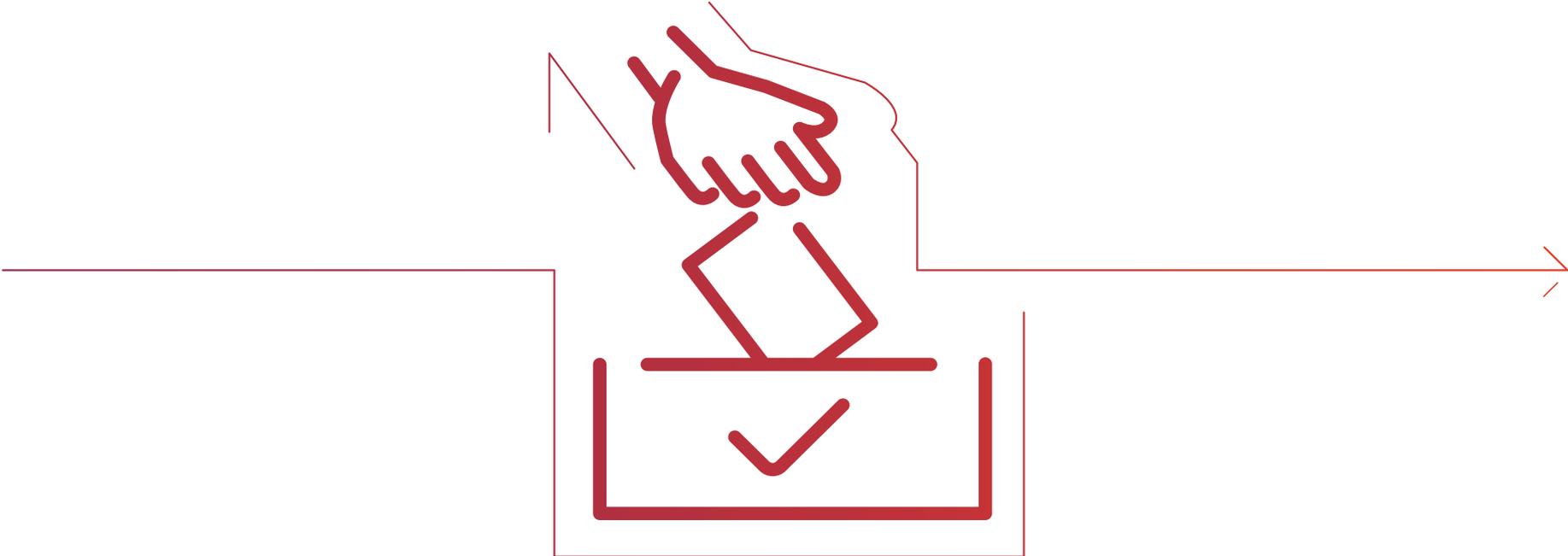


Organize around
long-term outcomes



**Introduce advocacy and
community organizing activities**

Register and mobilize voters



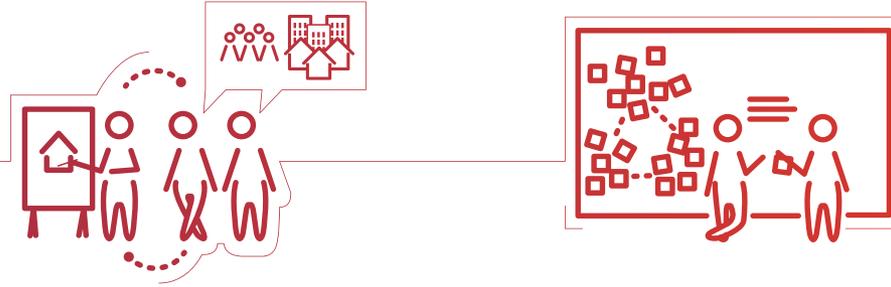


**Train and support participants
as leaders within the community**

Key principles that guide the work:

Examples of activities used to achieve them

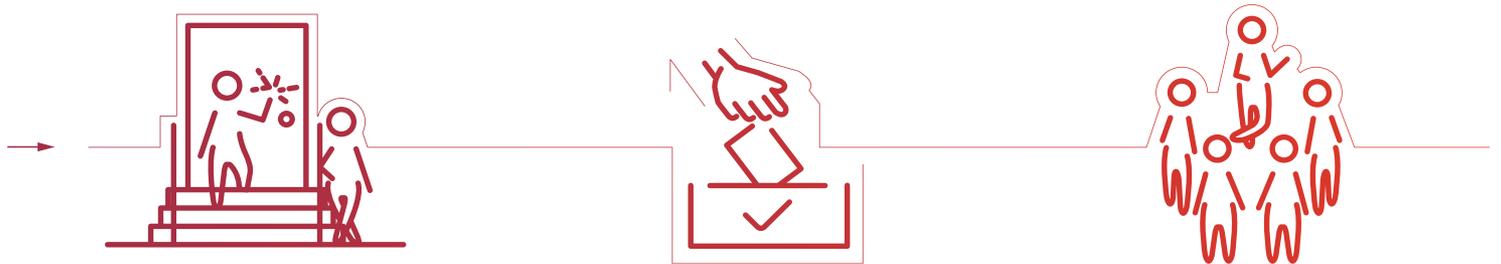
Figure out the systems and structures that need changing



Share power with participants



Organize around long-term outcomes



**Example I: Changing
organizational
practices to meet
community needs**

Before:

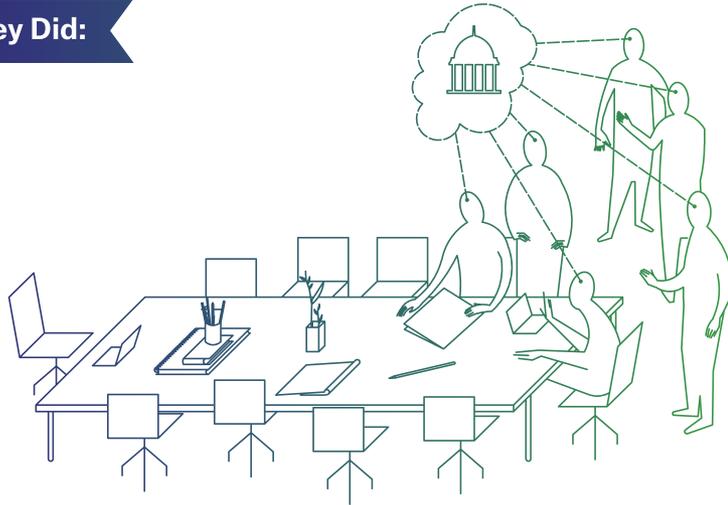
Organization advocated for vital programs and services



Vision for change:

In a season of budget cuts, staff at a settlement house lobbied the state to keep funding vital programs. They reflected on their success and saw how the campaign complemented advocacy for community needs in other areas of their work. Staff decided an increased commitment to direct advocacy and community organizing throughout the agency would make them a stronger partner to their community in achieving social change.

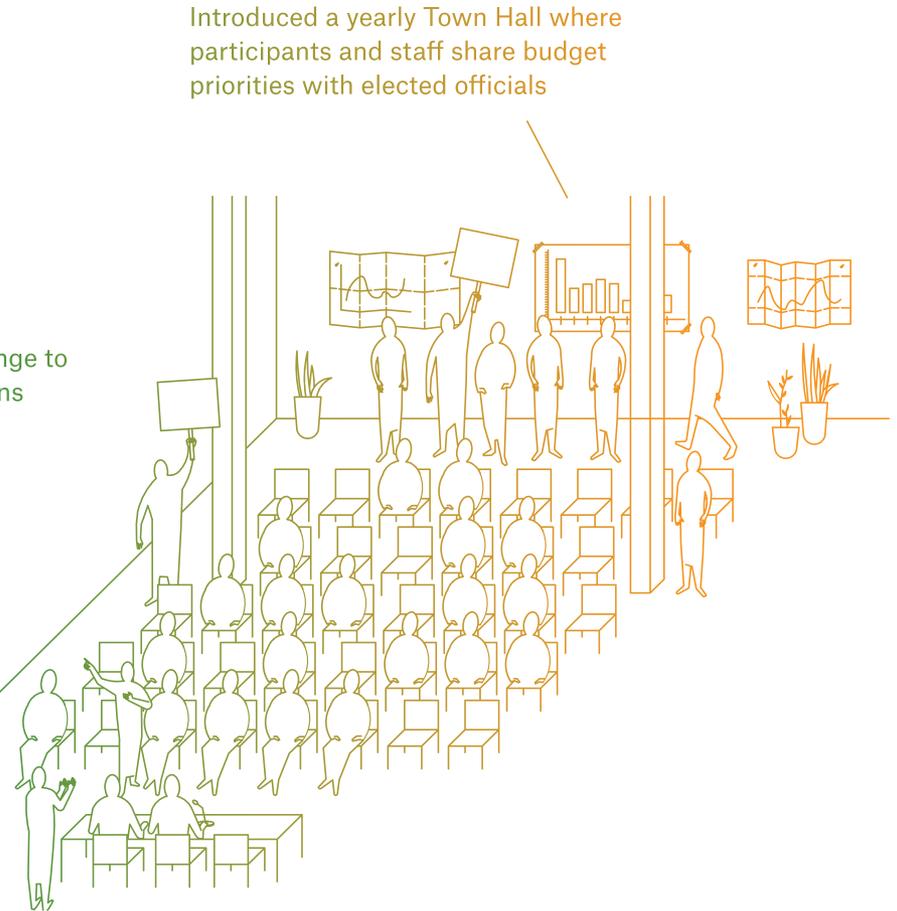
What They Did:



Created an advocacy committee to coordinate campaigns across departments and train staff on issues



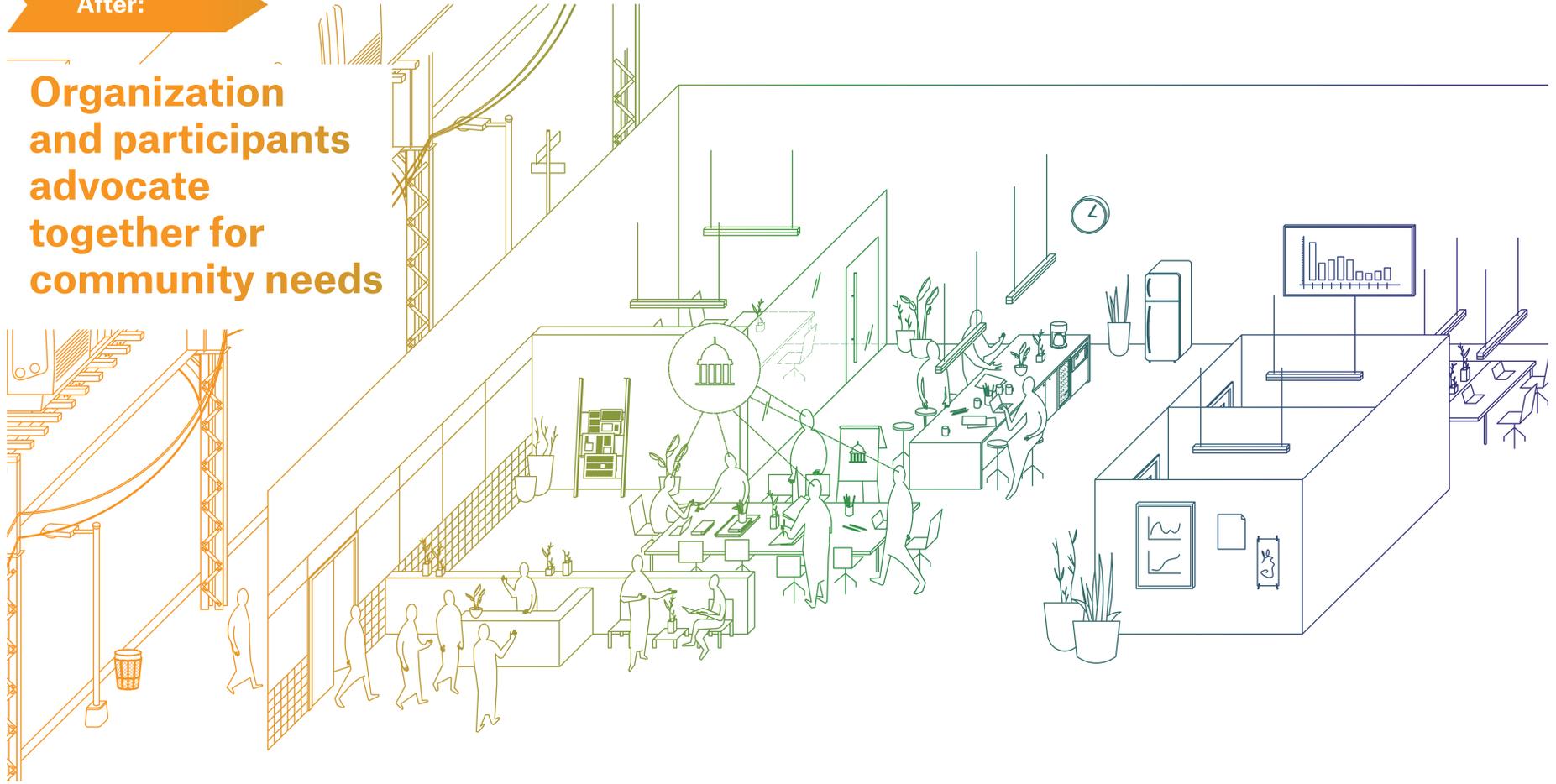
Added a commitment to organizing and social change to all full-time job descriptions



Introduced a yearly Town Hall where participants and staff share budget priorities with elected officials

After:

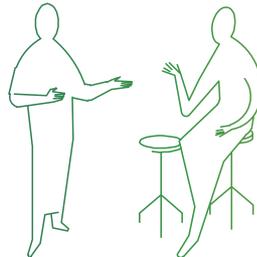
**Organization
and participants
advocate
together for
community needs**



Impacts

01.

Organization's structure and hiring practices reflect commitment to community advocacy, leadership development, and social change



02.

Staff and participants are aligned around community priorities and prepared to advocate for them

Example II:
Focusing on leadership
development to create
long-term impact

Before:

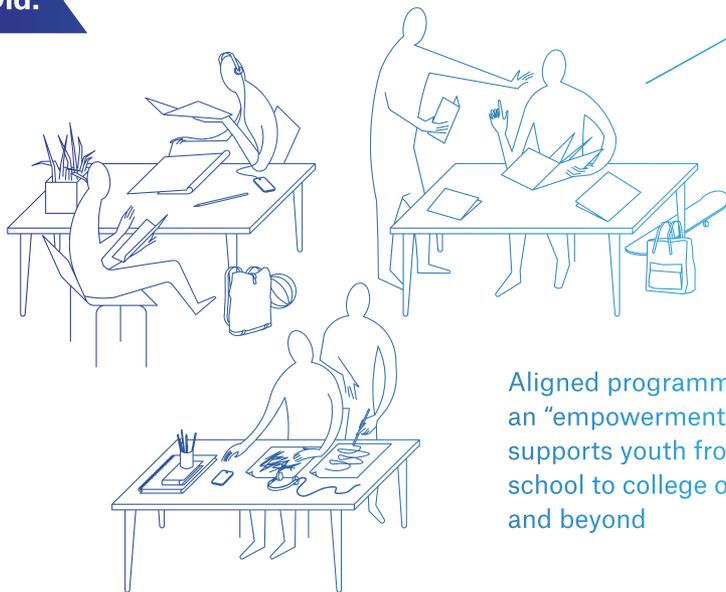
Staff implemented health programming focused on improving individual health outcomes



Vision for change:

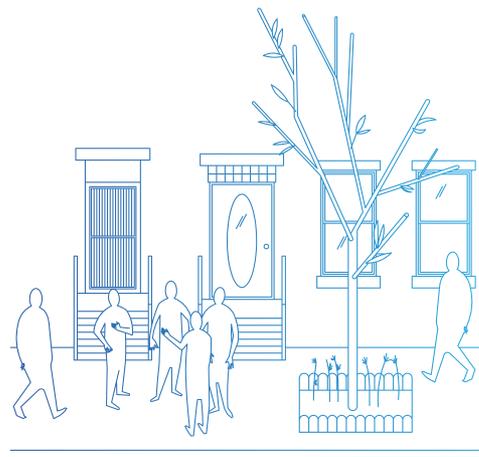
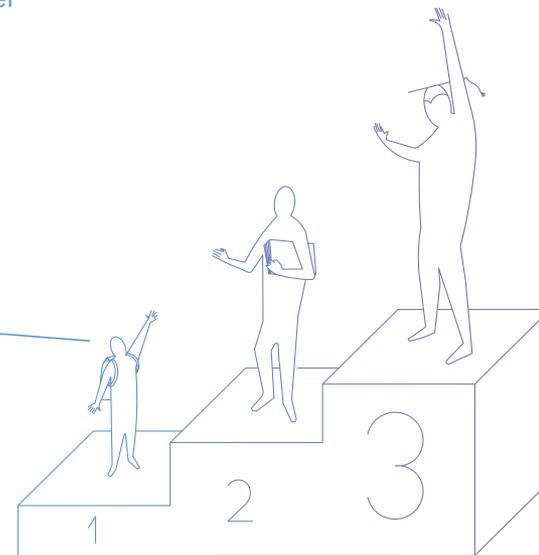
A small community development organization envisioned improving individuals' health by improving the broader health of the community. They saw focusing on youth development as a way to both improve health outcomes and foster a new generation of leaders in community-driven social change.

What They Did:



Introduced a peer-to-peer education model

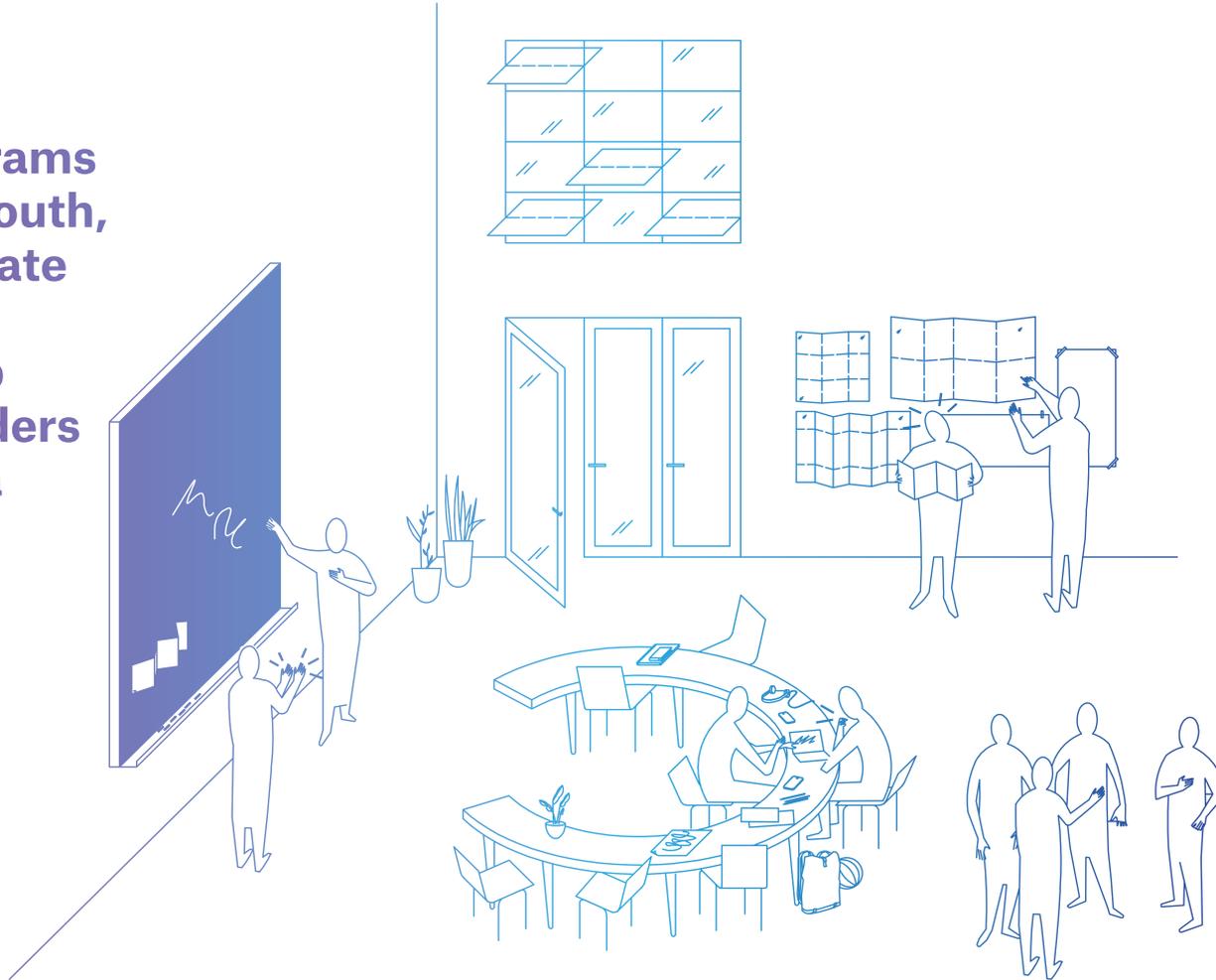
Aligned programming to create an "empowerment pipeline" that supports youth from middle school to college or employment and beyond



Integrated social justice and community organizing activities into youth programming

After:

Youth lead health programs with other youth, and participate in activities that develop them as leaders in creating a healthy and sustainable community



Impacts

01.

**Youth are
empowered as
educators and
agents of social
change**

02.

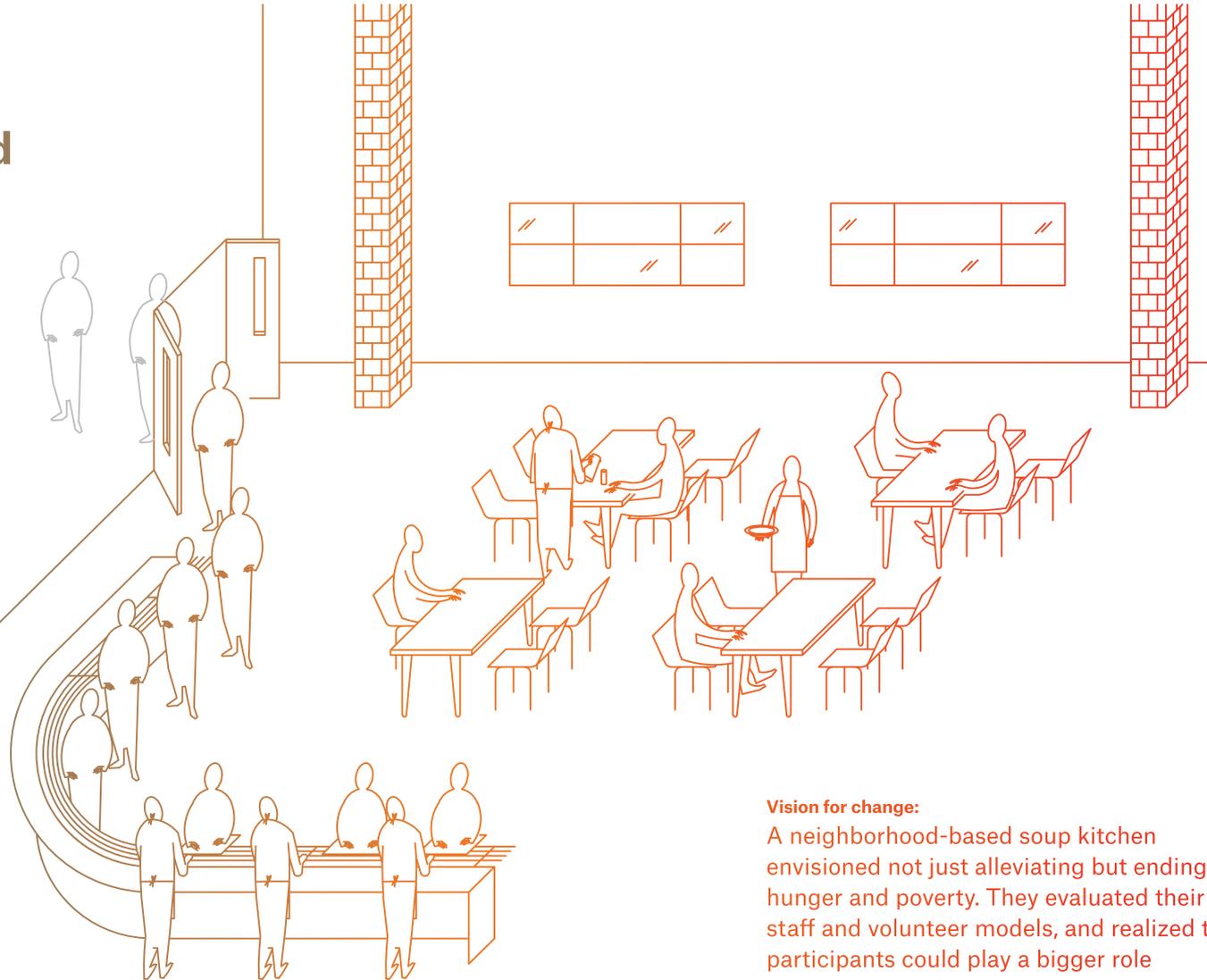
**Youth
contribute
directly to the
long-term
health and
sustainability
of their
neighborhood**



Example III:
Re-framing roles to
support participant
engagement

Before:

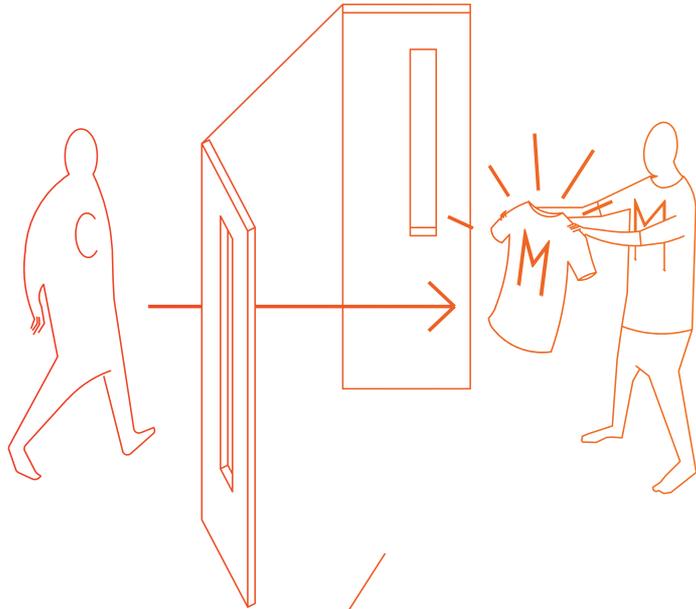
Staff and
volunteers served
participants
meals and
provided other
services



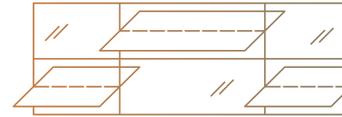
Vision for change:

A neighborhood-based soup kitchen envisioned not just alleviating but ending hunger and poverty. They evaluated their staff and volunteer models, and realized their participants could play a bigger role in carrying out that mission.

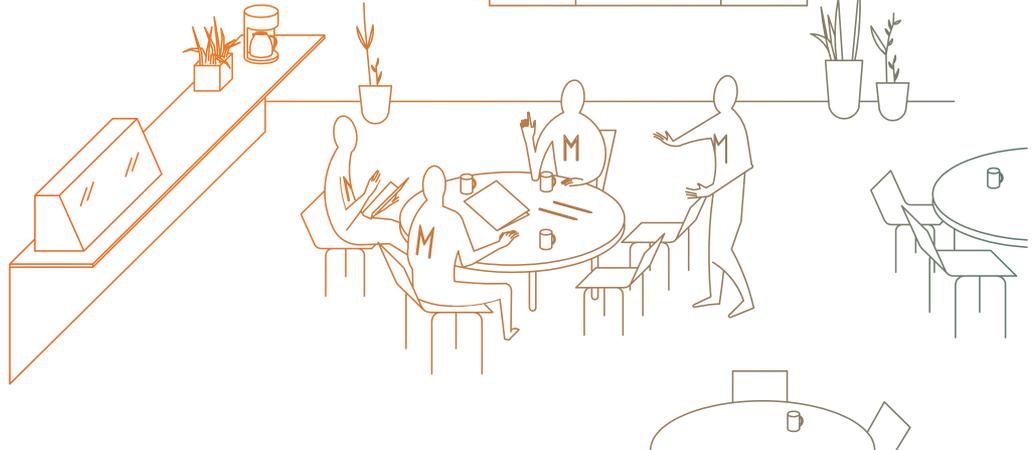
What They Did:



Created a Community Action Program, where members provide expertise and organize around policy issues

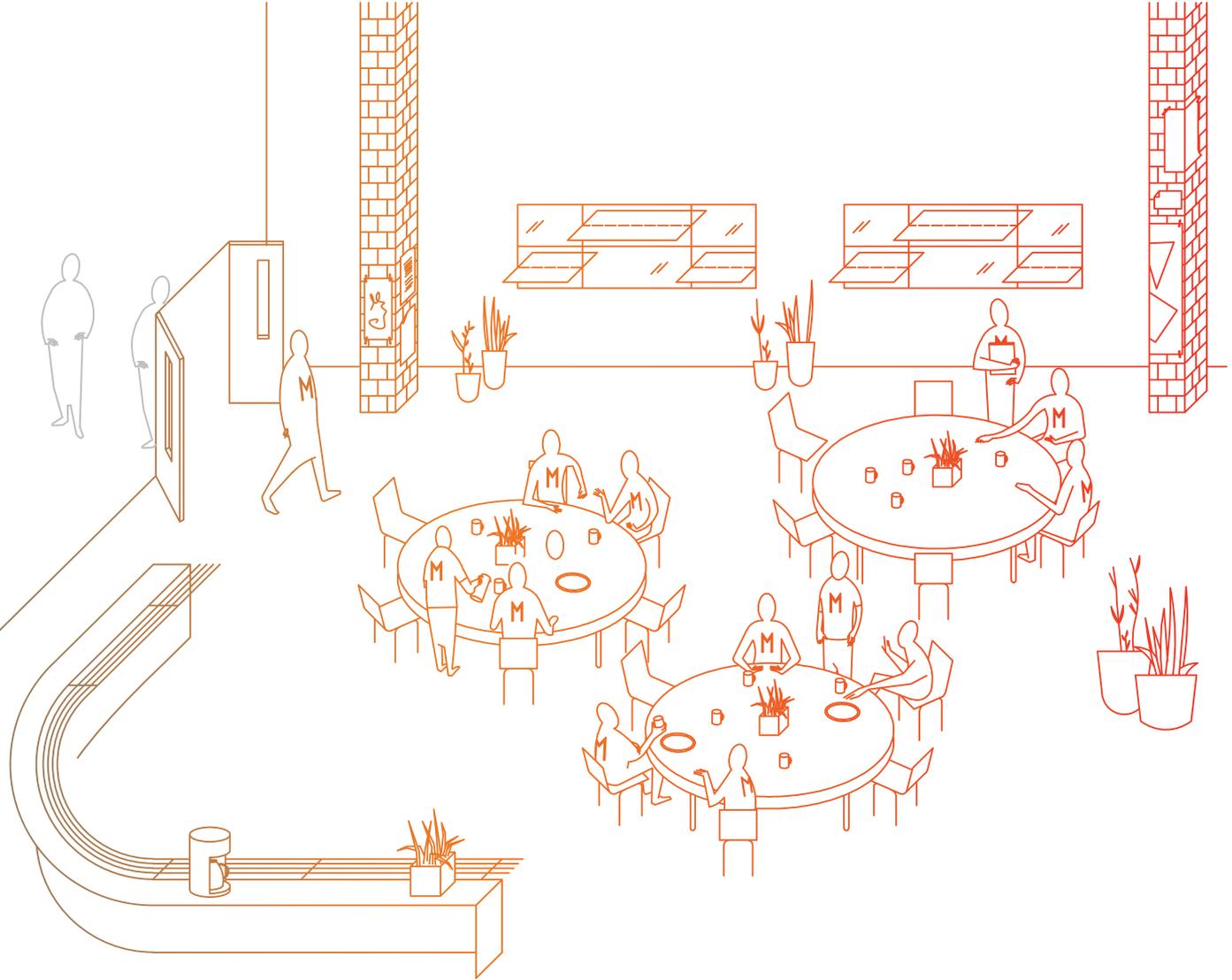


Instituted a membership model that treats everyone who walks through their door as a member and contributor to the organization, not as a client



After:

Members and staff serve meals together. Members also help guide the organization's programs, participate in advocacy campaigns, and engage in community organizing



Impacts

01.

Organization shifts from treating participants as clients to sharing power with them as members

02.

Membership programming provides a forum for identifying and prioritizing issues to organize around

03.

Members are engaged in shaping the organization and advocating for social change





Credits

**NEW YORK
FOUNDATION**



Building Movement Project

For more resources related to what you see here, visit www.nyf.org/engageforchange

Special thanks to the participants in the New York Foundation's Learning Lab:

Bridge Street Local Development Corporation
Chhaya Community Development Corporation
Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation
Fifth Avenue Committee
Henry Street Settlement
Jacob Riis Settlement House
MinKwon Center for Community Action

Neighbors Together
Queens Community House
Red Hook Initiative
Resilience Advocacy Project
Union Settlement House
United Neighborhood Houses

This project is a collaboration of the **New York Foundation**, the **Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP)**, and the **Building Movement Project**.

The New York Foundation is a steadfast supporter of community organizing and advocacy. Our grants support community-initiated solutions to solve local problems, constituents mobilizing for adequate and equitable resources, and groups organizing a collective voice among those whose voices have not been heard. nyf.org

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, particularly among historically underrepresented communities. welcometoCUP.org

The Building Movement Project develops research, tools, training materials and opportunities for partnership that bolster nonprofit organizations' ability to support the voice and power of the people they serve. buildingmovement.org

Design & Icons by WSDIA | WeShouldDoItAll
Scene Illustrations by Carolina Moscoso