Case Study: Breach Collective
Interview Date: Dec 7th, 2023
Interviewees:
- Jay Monteverde (he/him), Co-Founder, Board President
- Nick Caleb (he/him), Climate Energy Attorney has been on staff since Nov. 2020

Organizational Background:
- **Mission:** Breach Collective partners with communities on the front lines of the climate crisis to advance justice through locally-driven campaigns rooted in the power of grassroots organizing, legal advocacy, and human stories. The organization was founded in 2020 and their current work centers around:
  - Fossil fuel resistance, including natural gas
  - Building electrification
  - Labor movement building
  - Movement education
  - Internal anti-racism work
- **Region:**
  - All staff are based in Oregon
  - Their work is national with a concentration in the Pacific Northwest
- **Size:**
  - 6 staff members
  - 7 board members
  - Annual budget between $500k - $1 million
- **WSDN Status:**
  - Breach Collective is a WSDN that is also unionized with the Communication Workers of America.
  - When the organization was founded in 2020 the Board of Directors passed a labor neutrality resolution, which stated that the staff would have the autonomy to structure the organization how they saw fit.
  - All of the founding members had experience in unions and knew they wanted to be a unionized workplace. The union, Breach United, was recognized a year after its founding, and the Collective Bargaining Agreement was finalized in January 2023.

Structure:
- Breach Collective is a fully horizontal organization. Each quarter all staff present their quarterly work plan to be discussed and approved by the full team collectively. Most of the team’s work is driven by grant directives but each staff member is allowed to spend 10-15% of their time on un-funded projects.
- Supervision and oversight are handled by the Labor Management Committee, which is made up of both staff and Board members. New staff are supported through a mentorship structure for their first few months.
- Administrative responsibilities (such as payroll) are managed by the Operations Director, who is a ¾ time employee.
Board of Directors Structure:
- The Board is not hands-on. They hold overall managerial and fiduciary responsibility but they do not participate in organizational day-to-day work, with specific exceptions such as board members participating in supervisory work on the Labor Management Committee.
- Decisions that require board input and approval are clearly outlined in the Collective Bargaining Agreement. These include: the annual budget, changes to staff compensation, benefits and hiring, and budgetary changes over a certain threshold.

What has been integral to making this work for your team?
- Having some clear structures established while figuring everything else out. Such as the Labor Management Committee, work plan review and approval process, and monthly updates for the board.
- The Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) lays out all of the details of how the team works in this structure.
- Members of the team have to be motivated to build an equitable workplace to make this work effectively. This structure cannot just be driven by not wanting to have another bad boss, it must be driven by self-motivated individuals.
- This structure works best when team members are well-rested and feeling good. Which incentivizes strong work place benefits and balance.

What are some of the challenges you have faced since becoming a WSDN?
- As a new organization, the biggest starting challenge was raising enough money to pay people a living wage. As a team, they did not have a significant amount of formal fundraising experience but it ended up working out well that program staff communicated directly with foundations to fund projects they were deeply involved in.
- The staff did not have all of the administrative expertise that they needed. So they have had to find that expertise from board members or contracts.
- The team learned early on that to account for the many different perspectives that people bring to the work they needed a clear structure to guide them through conflict. The CBA now outlines a clear conflict resolution process.
- It can sometimes be unclear whose responsibility it is to focus on the workplace itself. If everyone on the team is focusing on their own area of work it becomes possible for macro perspective things like overall organizational health and financial sustainability to slip by. It has become clear that there is a need for the team to be continuously intentional about investing in collective ownership of these things.

What are some highlights you have experienced since becoming a WSDN?
- When you have a team of self-motivated people there is a lot of flexibility for folks to seize opportunities. As well as the flexibility to direct the focus of the organization. With the worker self-directed structure, the team has been able to support environmental justice fights when they need it most. This makes an impact on the campaign and the autonomy of the team.
● Team members are learning skills they did not previously have, such as fundraising.
● Collective ownership of campaigns and parts of the organization means that the work is dispersed more evenly without one person feeling all the burden of a hard decision or situation.

What advice would you give to an organization considering shifting to a WSDN?
● The protections of a union are essential to creating a democratic structure. Unionize when things are good so that you have protection and structure when things get hard. The conflict that may come from the unionization conversations will be worth it.
● Take a very clear and serious look at how the responsibilities will be shifted. If moving to a horizontal structure make sure to be very clear on how everything becomes shared, good and bad. Everyone will have to take on some of the awkwardness and the drudgery of management.
● Reach out to other organizations that have experimented with this and learn from them. Don’t go into it with a pie-in-the-sky attitude that this will be easier than a traditional structure. It’s not less labor but the benefits come from job security and material investment.