Case Study: Movement Sustainability Commons
Interview Date: Dec 11th, 2023
Interviewee: Yani Burgos (She/They), Co-Director, 4 years with Movement Sustainability Commons

Organizational Background:
- **Mission:** Movement Sustainability Commons nourishes and sustains people and groups working for justice, economic democracy, and liberation. We do this by offering affordable and high-quality services, practices, spaces, and pathways that support both interdependence and self-reliance for community self-determination.
- **Region:** Rooted regionally in New England with the majority of their staff and their work based out of Boston.
- **Size:**
  - 15 staff members
  - Advisory Board of 16-20 people
  - Annual budget above $1 million
- **WSDN Status:**
  - Movement Sustainability Commons is a fiscally sponsored project of Resist and Center for Economic Democracy. The organization has functioned as a Worker Self-Directed Nonprofit since its founding in 2020.

Structure:
- The governance of the Commons is managed by collaboration between the General Circle and the Coordinating Team.
  - The Coordinating Team manages all of the administrative responsibilities and internal decision-making of the organization. This team is made up of 6 staff members. All members of the Coordinating Team also sit on the General Circle.
  - The General Circle is responsible for macro perspective organizational guidance and budget review. Members of the General Circle include staff, community members, representatives from fiscally sponsored and participant organizations, and representatives from Resist and Center for Economic Democracy.
- Each of these groups practices consensus-based decision-making using the fist to five voting method.
- The majority of The Commons staff are Co-Directors and all staff are paid at the same salary rate.
- The Commons shares a structure with Resist called the Circle of Elders. The circle is made up of local community members who meet monthly to study transformative justice practice. The Circle of Elders can be utilized by The Commons and any of the groups in their network to provide mediation and recommendations in times of conflict and growth.
- **Board of Directors Structure:**
  - As a fiscally sponsored project, The Commons does not have their own Board of Directors.

What has been integral to making this work for your team?
● The Commons had the opportunity to build from the WSDN structures that were already in place at Resist. While they did replicate some things, like the Circle of Elders, they had to create some new structures for their unique needs. For example, The Commons has a much larger team than Resist. Initially, they wanted all of the team members to be in the Coordinating Team but they decided that having all staff hold that amount of strategic decision-making would require too much onboarding. So they narrowed down the Coordinating Team members and made sure there is always clear transparency to the rest of the team about what the Coordinating Team is working on at any given time.
● All staff go through a quarterly re-orientation to ensure systems and structures are clear.

What are some of the challenges you have faced since becoming a WSDN?
● While team members have varying expectations around work responsibility and the number of hours they work there are similar expectations around strategic thinking and overall org accountability. This can be particularly challenging for part-time staff to negotiate the overhead work in a smaller amount of weekly time.
● Navigating the balance between organizational strategy work and programmatic work has been an ongoing challenge for many staff.
● Budgeting can be challenging when staff need to increase their hours in order to complete their administrative tasks.
● Due to the nature of the work it is not easy to delineate a clear line between what is programmatic work and what is organizational development work. The organization could benefit from an individual staff person who just focuses on strategy and big-picture thinking.

What are some highlights you have experienced since becoming a WSDN?
● Budget transparency has felt really gratifying. Team members have a much deeper understanding of the overall budget and can use that to make informed decisions about their own work.
● Accountability and feedback systems have provided a lot of clarity on individuals' roles and overall feel like they are working well. The team does multiple feedback processes throughout the year.
● There is a higher level of trust in this organization than in a traditional nonprofit structure. The team has become used to creative problem-solving and collective decision-making together.

What advice would you give to an organization considering shifting to a WSDN?
● Go slowly and have patience with the timeline of culture change. Remember you are creating new language for your organization.
● Encourage (or maybe even demand!) creativity. This structure is so out of the box from what we have been trained to think is okay so it requires creative problem-solving.
● Adjust your policy around the probation period for new hires. Give them extra time and support to adjust to this brand-new structure.
● Acknowledge that there will be times when this structure is just confusing.