

Organizing Framework for Retake Our Democracy's Transformation Study Group



Vision Statement: We seek a just transition to a more equitable and sustainable way of life and will be guided by research and science, as well as the wisdom indigenous communities and those most impacted by the systems being studied. We will also examine the experience of other communities, states, and nations to help us understand what is possible, to educate others about our findings, and to move New Mexico communities toward that goal.

Statement of Purpose: Our current systems based on colonialism, capitalism, individualism, racism, sexism, consumerism, and other “isms” are failing us. To begin to envision a new way of life, we need to do more than simply reform those failing systems. We need to re-examine the core principles and assumptions behind those systems. And we need to re-examine the degree to which all of us have incorporated those core beliefs into our way of life. Many have unknowingly acquiesced to these systems, while those who recognize the injustices struggle with how to convey the urgency of the moment, the opportunity present, and how much is possible.

Across the world, COVID-19, the re-eruption of anti-racism protests, the collapse of the gas and oil industry, and climate change disasters have put a spotlight on the damaging impact of our current way of life. Most people’s suffering continues while the stock market and Wall Street thrive. This dramatic moment in our history provides the impetus and opportunity to begin reinventing our relationships with the natural world and with each other—how we think, act, and live—with more than just a few gentle reforms. We need to change it all. We need to build a base of people in NM who understands the need for such dramatic change and believes in its possibility.

We have formed the Transformation Study Group to research how to facilitate this sea-change in human thought and behavior. We have created a structure within which committed researchers and policy wonks can collaborate to develop a series of research briefs focused on specific transformational initiatives that meet the following criteria.

TSG Project Objectives:

- To author innovative, provocative studies that will impact transformational change, educate and motivate people to activate
- To build community research capacity in specific topic areas

TSG Target Audience:

- People and/or organizations who will benefit directly from Retake’s research studies
- Progressive Legislators interested in authoring new bills
- Existing advocacy networks who can publish the studies
- Submit a summarized version of the studies as Op-eds to media networks state-wide

Research Focus Criteria

We will focus on strategies/systems that:

- Are transformational

- Address a pressing need in the US, and more specifically in NM
- Protect and nurture our people and our environment
- Benefit the most vulnerable populations and natural resources
- Are most in need of research and development
- Potential to be adopted by the state, a NM community and/or individual businesses

What will the research process be?

Step I: Gather Inventory of Existing Research Resources & Models. Researchers will begin by reviewing the existing research within the area they have chosen and develop a one-page annotated list of research that should include name of publication or organization, links and 1-2 sentences on what was found. Then the group will weigh in and discuss how to focus initial research in each area. Your inventory of resources should include:

1. Title of article or website,
2. URL,
3. Brief description of what is useful at this link to include information we want to include in our white papers, e.g.:
 - a. an excellent need statement,
 - b. graphics that are compelling,
 - c. how the research might be relevant to NM; and/or
 - d. description of successful models.

Be especially mindful of articles that were published from a website that may have more resources related to your topic or others. And, as suggested in our meeting, consider including links to artwork, music, dance or other forms of artistic expression.

Step II: Share Your Findings. For now, send drafts to retakeresponse@gmail.com. We will explore a longer-term way to create a shared space for all of our findings.

Step III: Discuss Findings. This will be an ongoing process of collective review and honing of findings that will be conducted via zoom meetings.

What will the resulting research look like? A 4-5 page brief that outlines the following:

- **Need being addressed** with documentation of national, state and, where possible, local evidence of the need or system failure that the research is to address;
- **Key principles** of the transformation strategies;
- **Nations, states, or communities where the strategies are in place;**
- **List of publications** that amplify or support the strategies;
- **Proposed Action:** What immediate policy, regulation, state law or local ordinances should be considered to advance this systemic transformation; and
- **List of local, state and/or national advocates** for the strategies (or who could be in NM). This should include CBO advocacy groups, local grassroots organizations, and elected officials who could be allies.

Current Priority Initiatives: We propose to launch with the following 16 areas, acknowledging that this is an initial draft list that we will consider and adjust collaboratively.

1. **Public Bank:** A public bank would allow the state to deposit billions of dollars currently in Wall St. banks into a Public Bank that would manage funds and invest them in our state infrastructure, renewable energy grid, large capital improvements, our water systems, and other economic development initiatives.
2. **Progressive Tax Reform:** We want to examine tax systems in other countries where significantly more progressive taxation generates the revenues to make transformation possible.
3. **Health Security:** COVID has exposed our vulnerability to a disjointed health system that leaves millions of Americans at risk of health bankruptcy or no coverage. We will examine alternative forms of universal healthcare, focusing on our own Health Security for New Mexicans Campaign.
4. **Energy:** We obviously need to transition to renewable energy as swiftly as possible. How can this be done justly, expeditiously, and sustainably? It's unlikely the gas & oil industry will advance that work. Is nationalizing our energy industry the only path? What is being done in other countries?
5. **Utilities:** Currently, private corporations like PNM select, manage, and deliver the energy we consume in NM. Profit is the primary consideration for utility companies. We will explore how to municipalize our utilities and put them under state and local control.
6. **Prisons:** Our prisons focus far too much on punishment and too little on rehabilitation and successful transition back into society. As with the energy and utility industries, private prisons are focused on profit than rehabilitation.
7. **Public Safety:** Beyond prisons, we will examine how to transform our community public safety systems and the larger criminal justice framework that relies more on arrest and punishment than more proactive initiatives to provide expanded education, drug treatment, and economic opportunity.
8. **Local food production & distribution:** COVID has exposed our food insecurity as food chains have collapsed and prices have soared. But well before COVID, the need for locally controlled, sustainable food systems emerged. We will explore how other communities have stimulated local food production, processing, and distribution.
9. **Democratizing the Workplace.** We need much stronger protection of workers overall, including living wages, decent benefits (until we can make health benefits not dependent on peoples' jobs), healthy working conditions, and workers' participation in company decisions. Worker owned coops is but one example of how this can be achieved. We will explore Mondragon in Spain, the University of Wisconsin's Center for Cooperatives, the Democracy Collaborative, and others who have been pioneering this more democratic means of organizing work and production.
10. **Community land trusts:** Community land trusts hold great promise as a means of reorganizing how we think about our land, housing, and communities and a way of building local community wealth without gentrification.
11. **Local renewable energy systems:** Part of a just energy transition is to allow local control by cities, counties, and tribal communities. We will explore how other countries have developed local energy generation and distribution systems.
12. **Infrastructure development in rural and indigenous communities:** Rural communities across the state suffer from collapsing roads, inequitable telecommunications systems, and lack of access to critical health and human services supports. We will examine ways in which public banks and other resources can expedite addressing these inequities.
13. **Water:** With the climate catastrophe racing towards us, water will become an even more essential resource, especially in NM. Our water systems can no longer remain antiquated, our use of water

must be scrupulously controlled, and science-based tools must be used to ensure prudent use of and equitable access to water.

14. **Election Reform.** Many of the systems we seek to change are controlled by moneyed interests' influence on the electoral and legislative processes. We will examine ways to remove the influence of money from politics and research how other countries organize the election process.
15. **Re-Imagining Education.** Our education system doesn't prepare students for careers, relationships, parenting, or to develop critical thinking skills necessary to good decision-making in most any sphere of life, most especially the civic process. How could this be done differently? What models exist?
16. **Anti-Racism.** It isn't enough to not be a racist, we need to develop ways to be an active anti-racist and to construct public policy that values and supports those behaviors. What could this look like?
17. **Imagining Clean Environment.** Our air, water, land and food are routinely poisoned because we are unable to invent a system to regulate our relationship with these vital resources. What would sustainable stewardship of these resources look like? [This came from Richard and creates overlap with # 13 Water, above.]
18. **Reimagining the Corporate Sector.** Our corporate sector runs rampant. Why is anything too big to fail? How can our corporate sector be reorganized or regulated to meet the needs of people and planet?
19. **Affordable Safe Housing for Everyone Without Gentrification.** This has been an almost impenetrable challenge in most of the US. But the use of community land trusts and the involvement of a State Public Bank could be among the strategies that unlock this puzzle.
20. **Transportation.** Creating vibrant public transit systems that rely upon electric vehicles and ultimately renewably powered trains and trucks.
21. **Social Safety Net.** Many of the issues above address issues of poverty, employment, housing, and other factors central to preventing the need for a social safety net. But not everyone will immediately be able to benefit from those resources and may need supports temporarily or, for those with some chronic conditions, for their lifetime. What would a human-centered, dignified and empowering system look like?

We recognize that there are other issues that are not on this list, but we wanted to start with a manageable number, develop a series of white papers and then build out the list of issues.

Comments welcome at RetakeResponse@gmail.com