

THE CENTER FOR ARTISTIC ACTIVISM:

15 YEARS OF IMPACT



*Making the Impossible
Possible Convening,
Atlanta, Georgia (2023).
Photo by Stephanie
Howard Photography.*



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Many years on, I still quote or refer to information and wisdom I gained during my time with C4AA. It was one of the most intensive/enjoyable learning periods of my life. The organisation and formatting of the residency are still things I take from regularly for my own work in activism through art. I was very lost and naive when I joined the group. Today I am the lead creative at a studio where all of our work hooks around activism through art. I could not be more grateful to the work which C4AA do.

— **Ailbhe O'Connor**, artist and activist, Ireland

In 2009, when Steve Lambert and I co-founded the Center for Artistic Activism, we believed that combining the most impactful elements of activism with the transformative power of art could drive meaningful change. We set out to merge our expertise and collaborated with countless individuals to better understand how art and activism can work together most effectively. This led to the development of a methodology for artistic activism designed to help people use creative approaches to enhance the impact of their advocacy. Fifteen years later, the Center has grown and reached thousands. This year we decided to reflect on how our artistic activism methodology has influenced this community. The result is the report we are excited to share with you, one that represents the hard work and dedication of our entire team at the Center for Artistic Activism.

Stephen Duncombe

Co-Founder and Research Director
Center for Artistic Activism

*La Mega Clase,
Orlando, Florida (2022).
Photo by Eli Berrios.*



15 YEARS OF IMPACT

The Center for Artistic Activism celebrates its 15th anniversary in December 2024. Since our founding in 2009, the Center has trained over 4000 artists and activists in more than 20 countries across six continents.

Assessing Our Impact

We have mentored individuals and organizations, conducted independent research and assessments, and designed tools to be used by change-makers. We wanted to understand what effect we've had in our decade and a half of existence, so we commissioned this self-study of our impact. The project seeks to understand the Center's impact on people and communities at multiple levels.

Empowering Change-Makers

The results show that the Center for Artistic Activism empowers people by equipping them with the tools, strategies, and community they need to amplify their impact. The Center's ideas and methodology help advocates and activists achieve campaign aims because they provide both practical tools and creative methods to establish ambitious goals, connect with audiences, and come up with and refine innovative and effective tactics.

Our Theory of Change

Our theory of change is simple: **we believe that tapping into culture and leveraging creativity are essential for social change, and we provide individuals with creative skills and inspiration they can use to make, and sustain, change.** *We make and sustain change by how we impact others who go on to create change.*

Amplifying our Alumni's Impact

Through extensive research on our alumni and programs, we have identified eight key areas they attribute to enhancing their impact. These include fostering imagination, where trainees learn to envision transformative solutions rather than just critique problems. They're encouraged to innovate by breaking out of routine tactics, engaging emotions to inspire action, and applying structured strategies to maximize their campaigns' effectiveness. We also prioritize assessment, teaching alumni to measure impact thoughtfully rather than rely on "magical thinking"

The C4AA helps build a supportive community of like-minded activists, which reduces the isolation often felt in advocacy work. Our approach enables alumni to share and adapt C4AA's tools and strategies within their circles, enabling cross-pollination of artistic approaches to activism. By bridging art and activism, we cultivate a blend we call "æffect," enhancing emotional engagement and real-world impact. **Ultimately, C4AA alumni leave with stronger imaginations, clearer strategies, and renewed commitment to their causes.**

Æffecting the World

For example, the Center's tools have allowed small and large organizations to re-think and strengthen their impact. Organizations like Greenpeace were motivated by the Center's work to embed creativity in their planning processes, adopting many of the tools C4AA has developed in their training manuals. Activist Migen Qiraxhi of Albania incorporated the Center's ideas to use joy and humor in campaigns that fought against corruption in public universities. Cultural organizer Roshani Thakore employed C4AA's objective-setting methods in Georgia to create impactful campaigns promoting civic engagement.

Other alumni have led campaigns that have resulted in successes like protecting abortion access

in Kansas, Ohio, Montana, Arizona, California, and New York, collecting 40,000 Commit To Vote cards across Georgia, persuading the South African Law Reform Commission to issue a long-delayed report on changing laws concerning sex work, and pressuring the North Macedonia government to spend 15 million Euros in infrastructural development, among other wins.

Guiding Innovation in Advocacy

Our research shows that the Center helps progressive advocacy work advance by giving advocates inspiration and motivation to innovate and practical methodologies to increase the success of their campaigns. The results and insights from this project will help the Center continue strengthening its programs to serve advocates and better fulfill its mission of helping people use their creativity and culture to effect power.

4175

People trained
since founding

164

Training activities
since founding

58

Countries with
Center alumni

20

Countries with in-person
training activities



*Cirque d'Vote (2020).
Photo by Emergency
Circus.*

8 TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICES THAT HELP PEOPLE ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

The Impact Project demonstrates that our training and resources have helped advocates worldwide in these key ways:

1. IMAGINATION:

Envision solutions not only by critiquing what's wrong but by dreaming of what a better world might look and feel like, sparking communities to believe in the impossible and take steps toward building it today.

2. INNOVATION:

Break out of old routines by embracing risk, surprise, and fresh thinking, injecting creativity into campaigns and organizations to move forward in bold, new directions.

3. EMOTION:

Inspire and engage people by appealing to the heart and the mind, tapping into the emotional power of artistic approaches to activism to spark passion and joy for social change.

4. STRATEGY:

Transform creative visions into impactful campaigns with thoughtful planning, including setting clear goals, identifying audiences, building prototypes, and strategically redirecting efforts for real-world success.

5. ASSESSMENT:

Measure the true impact of artistic activism by incorporating holistic evaluation from the start, building reflection and iteration into projects to enhance effectiveness and ensure meaningful change.

6. COMMUNITY:

Connect with like-minded individuals worldwide, fostering a sense of belonging and support among those practicing artistic activism through training, collaborations, and shared projects.

7. POLLINATION:

Spread ideas and inspire others by adopting and adapting effective tools and resources, creating new approaches to artistic activism that expand its reach and redefine its possibilities across diverse contexts.

8. ÆFFECT:

Combine the power of art and activism to create "æffect," blending emotional impact with strategic goals and gaining validation, clarity, and confidence to sustain and grow creative activism efforts.

①

The Copenhagen Experiment,
Copenhagen, Denmark (2019).
Photo by Mads Emil Hilmer.



15 YEARS OF THE CENTER



④

The Art of Activism:
Your All-Purpose Guide
to Making the Impossible
Possible by Steve
Duncombe + Steve
Lambert

The impact of the Center for Artistic Activism is felt through our programs and projects. **Highlights over the past fifteen years include:**

2009: “College of Tactical Culture” workshop at Eyebeam in New York City where **the idea for The Center for Artistic Activism was born.**

2010: C4AA interviews artistic activists, researches theory and history of the practice, and develops **training curriculum.**

2011: First **training workshop** held with anti-segregation activists in Mebane, North Carolina.

2013: First **international workshop** with maternal healthcare activists in Nairobi, Kenya.

2014: First workshop in Skopje, North Macedonia, launching a **multi-year relationship with artistic activists in the Western Balkans** region.

2015: First workshop with sex worker activists in Cape Town, South Africa, initiating a multi-year **collaboration with Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT).**

2016: First workshop with **staff and program directors of a non-profit organization**, Open Society Foundations, New York.

2016: The Æffect Project, **researching the assessment and impact** of artistic activism, starts.

2016: **Webinar series** in response to the 2016 U.S. elections, featuring global creative activists, begins.

2017: First **Accelerator Mentoring Program**, with SWEAT in South Africa.

2017: First workshop **training staff of a major global advocacy organization**, with Greenpeace.

*Even nearly a decade later,
it's probably one of the
best trainings
I've attended, ever.*

— **Arian Kajtezovic,**
Trans Rights
Organizer, Croatia



② Delivering Democracy, Honesdale, Pennsylvania (2020). Photo by Tannis Kowalchuk.

2017: First workshop in Conakry, Guinea, with regional artists and activists, beginning **multi-year relationship with artistic activists in West Africa**.

2018: The Copenhagen Experiment ①, **a public experiment** testing the effectiveness of creative vs. conventional activism, is conducted in Denmark.

2018: Regional Creative Hubs project begins, linking artists, activists, and journalists working on **anti-corruption campaigns in West Africa and the Western Balkans**.

2019: First organizational **research and assessment consultancy**, A Blade of Grass, New York.

2019: First collaboration with Guerilla Science, bringing C4AA's research and training to **creative science advocacy**.

2019: The Æffect App, a free online, interactive **planning and assessment tool**, goes live.

2020: Free the Vaccine Campaign begins, training hundreds of artists and activists around the globe online working in teams on **creative campaigns for equitable access to vaccines for COVID-19**.

2020: Launch of Unstoppable Voters, a multi-year project working with dozens of local **voting rights organizations across the USA** ② to integrate creativity into their campaigns.

2021: **First training-of-the trainers** workshops are held in North Macedonia, Bosnia, and Senegal ③.

2021: *The Art of Activism* ④, a **book** version of C4AA's training program, is published.

③ Artistic Activism Training Graduation, Gorée Senegal (2019).

2021: Revolutionizing Activism, C4AA's **online discussion** series, starts.

2021: A 16-part online **training program for Greenpeace** climate advocates across Southeast Asia begins.

2022: The Utopia Project **exhibit** opens at the Smithsonian.

2022: Learning Labs, a series of **on-line trainings inspired by *The Art of Activism***, begins.

2022: Launch of C4AA's first **fellowship program** for advocacy staff working on voting rights.

2023: The Creative Campaigns Toolkit, providing **resources for advocacy groups**, is released.

2023: C4AA's first **conference**, Making the Impossible Possible Summit for voting advocates, is hosted in Atlanta, Georgia.

2023: The Unstoppable Voters project reaches over **1000 voting advocates** supported across **300 actions** in **29 states**.

2023: The Artistic Activism Research Co-Lab, **an international group of scholars and artists** devoted to researching artistic activism, is established.

2024: Faculty Fellowship program begins, working with **faculty and students** on creative advocacy for voting rights.

2024: The MAAP Project, an **online mapping** of artistic activist organizations around the world, goes live.

2024: The Artistic Activism Test Kitchen, a program to stimulate **risk-taking and prototyping** through funding and mentoring experimental interventions, results in dozens of actions to increase civic engagement.



Albania

UNIVERSITY OF CORRUPTED SCIENCES

In 2019, the Center's training equipped activists from the Balkans with innovative strategies to make activism more impactful, emphasizing audience engagement and interaction. Anti-corruption activists like Migen Qiraxhi learned to design actions involving the public and centering audiences—a key aspect highlighted throughout the training.

The University of Corrupted Sciences was a campaign that resulted from this training, a satirical initiative launched by activists in Albania to address academic corruption. On the International Day of Education, the activists awarded mock diplomas to citizens, symbolizing the ease with which fraudulent degrees were obtained in the Albanian education system, where titles and diplomas were often exchanged for money. The campaign's humorous approach quickly gained public attention and media coverage, with TV hosts even receiving diplomas during interviews, reinforcing the ironic message.

This unconventional strategy highlighted the risks of corruption in education while making the issue accessible to the public. The campaign achieved greater visibility through humor and interaction than traditional activism and sparked meaningful conversations, demonstrating the power of creative activism to engage citizens and promote social change.

This playful approach was new in our environment, especially for civil society. It created a unique energy that drew both the public and journalists to our message.

— **Migen Qiraxhi**, Civil Society Advocate, Albania



University of Corrupted Sciences, Tirana, Albania (2019). Photo by Migen Qiraxhi.

USA

DEMOCRASEXY

The Center has this incredible ability to make you feel like your wildest ideas aren't just valid—they're necessary.

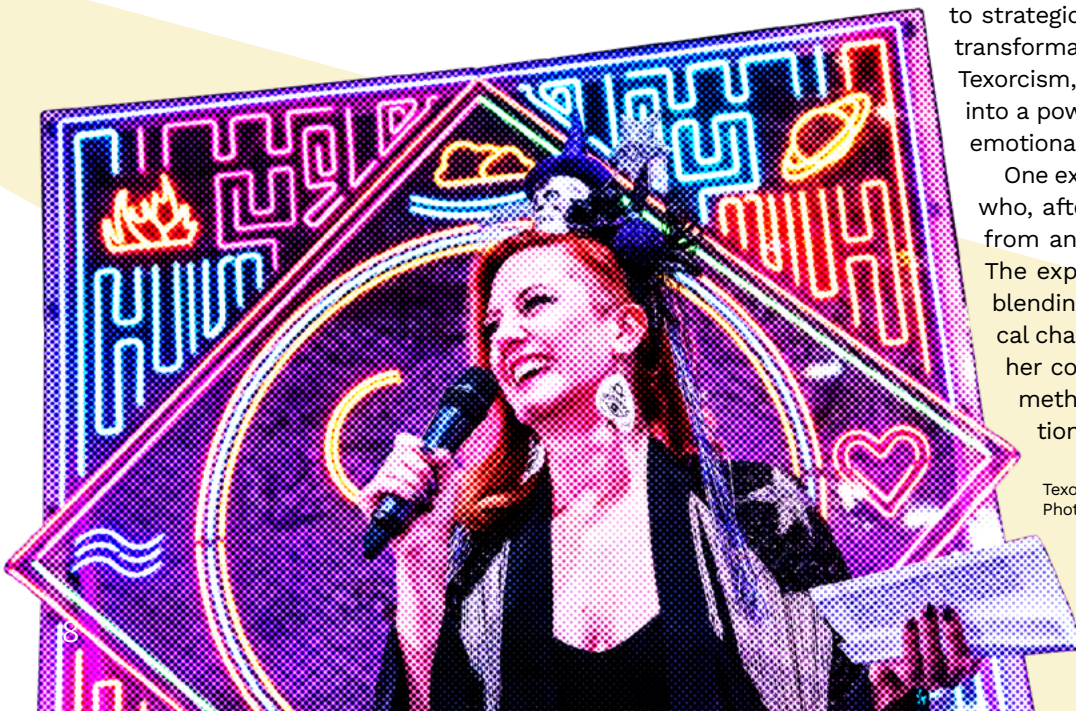
— **Becky Bullard**, Civic Engagement Activist, USA

Becky Bullard is the visionary behind Democrasexy, a platform merging creativity with civic engagement in Texas. Her collaboration with the Center shaped her approach, blending pleasure with purpose to make activism enjoyable and sustainable.

As a “pleasure activist,” Becky believes activism should inspire excitement, not dread. Working with C4AA, she shifted from passion-driven projects to strategic efforts with measurable goals. This transformation profoundly impacted her project, Texorcism, turning it from a loosely defined idea into a powerful ritual that engaged participants emotionally and inspired action.

One example involves a local business owner who, after attending Texorcism, transformed from anxious to energized and ready to act. The experience demonstrated the power of blending art and activism to mobilize practical change. Becky credits C4AA with building her confidence to embrace unconventional methods, showing that bold experimentation can lead to significant impact.

Texorcism, Austin, Texas (2022). Photo by Nicki Lemon.





The Center's training was eye-opening because it provided the language and theory behind what we were already instinctively doing. It wasn't just creativity for creativity's sake; it was about making our activism more effective.

—Ishtar Lakhani, Sex and Gender Activist, South Africa

South Africa

SWEAT

In 2016, the Center partnered with the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Task Force (SWEAT) at the AIDS Conference in South Africa, aiming to spotlight sex workers' rights, a topic often stigmatized and ignored. Through this partnership, SWEAT developed a "count-up clock" that tracked how long speakers avoided the term "sex work." When the term was finally mentioned for the first time, the person holding the clock (and a red umbrella) celebrated, triggering a 30-second cheer. This creative action encouraged other speakers to mention sex work, shifting the narrative and drawing significant media attention to the issue.

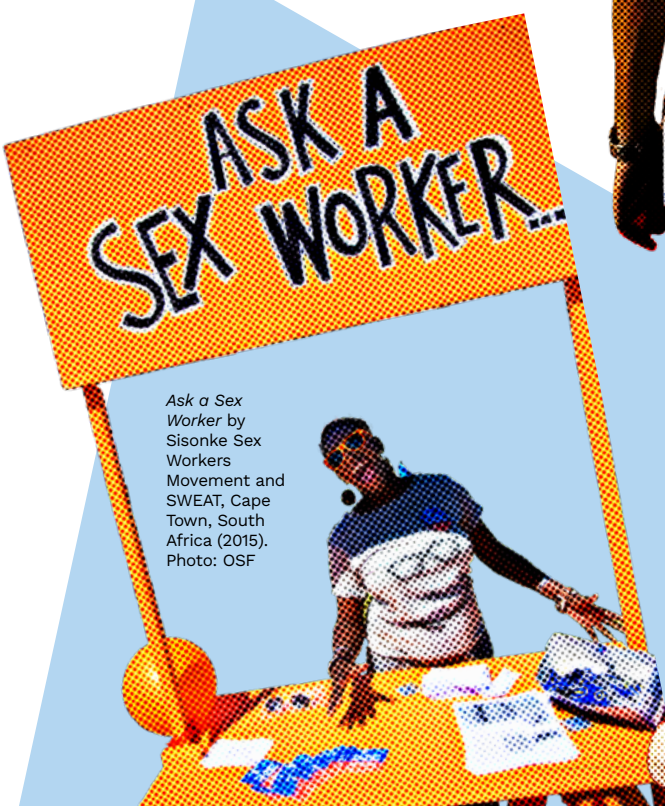


SWEAT's creative activism supported by the Center also included the impactful "Desk of Disappointment," where a skeleton sat at the government desk. The action pressured the government to release a long-delayed report on sex worker legislation. According to Ishtar Lakhani, SWEAT's Advocacy Manager, "The 2016 AIDS Conference was pivotal. Other organizations saw the impact of the Center's work and realized we weren't just 'crazy weirdos'—our creative methods were effective."

Another notable campaign was the mock "Sex Worker for President" during the South African elections, which surprisingly received widespread support and led to political parties including sex worker rights in their platforms. According to Ishtar, "C4AA gave us the tools to connect theory with practice, and it wasn't just about creativity for creativity's sake—it made our activism more effective."

The partnership with C4AA not only strengthened SWEAT's internal team but also inspired broader movements, setting a new standard for creative activism. The Center's influence continues in how SWEAT and other organizations approach advocacy, demonstrating the lasting impact of innovative, creative strategies.

Above & Left: Double Doors. AIDS Conference, Amsterdam (2018). Bottom Right: Under our umbrella. Cover of Daily News (2016).



Ask a Sex Worker by Sisonke Sex Workers Movement and SWEAT, Cape Town, South Africa (2015). Photo: OSF



4175

People trained since founding

164

Training activities since founding

THE CENTER BY THE NUMBERS

58

**Countries with
Center alumni**

20

**Countries with
in-person training
activities**





We have trained organizations and individuals to develop campaigns and strategies across dozens of issue areas. Some of the broad categories these fall into include, but aren't limited to:

- Abortion Rights and Reproductive Justice
- Anti-Corruption and Democratic Governance
- Antiracism and Antibigotry
- Civic Engagement and Voting Rights
- Environmental Justice and Climate Action
- Public Health and Access to Medicines
- Human Rights and Advocacy for Marginalized Groups
- Immigration and Refugee Rights
- Labor Rights and Dignity
- LGBTQ+ Rights and Inclusivity
- Restorative Justice
- Youth Engagement and Education

USA

FAIR COUNT

For **Jeanine Abrams McLean**, president of Fair Count, the training by the Center transformed her approach to civic engagement. She learned to integrate joy with creativity and strategic objectives, moving beyond enthusiastic efforts to structured, impactful projects.

One significant outcome was the development of Fair Count's "WHYlie the Whale" initiative, which targeted rural communities. Initially designed to engage children, this flying life-size inflatable whale unexpectedly attracted adults who engaged in voting-related conversations in a lighthearted atmosphere. With the help of the whale and other engaging tactics, Fair Count collected 40,000 Commit To Vote cards in 40 Georgia counties during the very important 2022 election cycle.

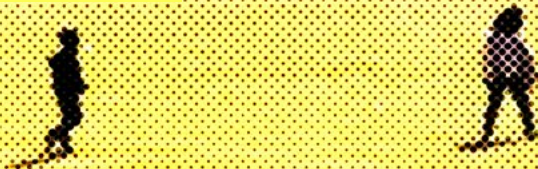
Jeanine's experience with C4AA gave her the tools to think big while creating practical prototypes, empowering her team to be creative and realistic in their activism. This partnership continues to shape how Fair Count connects with communities and fosters civic engagement.

WHYlie The Whale, Georgia (2022). Photo by Aileen Loy.

The best thing about C4AA is it's one thing for people to talk about how we should use creative methods, and another to develop training resources that show there is a process for making this type of work effective.

— **Jeanine Abrams McLean**,
President of Fair Count, USA

"WHYlie the Whale" was conceived and executed by Aileen Loy



The Center's training introduced me to innovative strategies that have enriched my community engagement practices. Being part of the C4AA community has connected me with like-minded professionals, fostering collaborations that have expanded my work's reach.

— **Roshani Thakore**, Director, Community Engagement & Culture Program, Atlanta Regional Commission, USA

USA

ROSHANI THAKORE

Roshani Thakore, an artist and organizer, leveraged the Center for Artistic Activism's training to reimagine community engagement at the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). Introduced to C4AA's Creative Campaigns Toolkit, she integrated its methods, notably the Creative Process and Audience Personas, into ARC's community practices.

This approach enabled planners to move beyond “problem-solving” into a more reflective and audience-focused practice, fostering meaningful engagement.

One significant project applied these principles to an agricultural planning event, reframing it as a joyful “food festival” for a community without a grocery store. Roshani also introduced the concept of utopia, encouraging her team to envision aspirational goals, adding depth and purpose to their work.

Through C4AA's influence, Roshani noted a shift in ARC's perspective, emphasizing creativity, joy, and community-centered approaches. This transformation not only built stronger community relationships but also empowered local participants to take an active role in shaping their environment.



Making the Impossible Possible Convening, Atlanta, Georgia (2023).
Photo by Stephanie Howard Photography.

Senegal

JOURNAL RAPPE

Keyti, a Senegalese hip-hop artist, co-founded Journal Rappé, a rap-based news program that gained international attention. Initially operating without significant financial backing, Journal Rappé became a powerful tool for political commentary and social change in Senegal. In 2019, Keyti began collaborating with the Center, which provided him with the tools and frameworks to refine his approach to activism.

Through the training, Keyti learned to integrate structured processes and strategic planning into his creative work. This clarity not only improved the execution of his projects but also enhanced his ability to articulate strategies, both with his team and external stakeholders. The Center's emphasis on the importance of planning and evaluation empowered Keyti to measure the impact of his work more effectively, ensuring that his projects created the desired social change. He has also become a trainer for the Center, and has trained alumni from various countries.

What I learned is to have a clear process because it will help you know where you are, and it will help you go back to things when you feel like 'okay, I didn't expect this. This is not working. Let me go back to the previous phase.'
I also learned it is important to measure and monitor your actions because it informs the next project you're going to do.

— **Keyti**, Artistic Activist, Senegal



Abossé reçoit une pierre sur la tête, son combat contre Lac Rose reporté • POI

Still from video by Journal Rappe (2013).

TRANS GENDER EUROPE

These events have been described as little worlds of our own that are just magical and not like anything else you encounter in the outside world. And then it creates this environment where you are allowed to dream and think of these worlds.

— **Arian Kajtezović**, Trans Rights Organizer, Croatia



Arian Kajtezović, a trans activist in the Balkans, began their journey with the Center in 2015 at a School for Creative Activism Workshop in Berlin. This training, in collaboration with Trans Gender Europe (TGEU), welcomed participants from 13 European countries, equipping Ari with creative strategies for activism. Applying these lessons across the Western Balkans, especially in Croatia, Ari introduced visionary approaches to trans and intersex communities, creatively addressing challenges in trans healthcare.

The training's impact became evident in events like the Trans Day of Remembrance, where Ari's organization shifted focus from solely commemorating loss to celebrating resilience and solidarity. The training profoundly shaped Ari's leadership and strategic approach. This collaboration has spurred the creation of new programs and organizations in the Balkan trans-activist community, highlighting the lasting influence of creativity and strategy in Ari's activist efforts.

*School for Creative Activism,
Berlin, Germany (2015).*

Global Online

FREE THE VACCINE

In the **COVID-19** pandemic's early months, hundreds of people—many new to activism and public health advocacy—gathered weekly online to pressure governments, scientists, and officials to make COVID-19 vaccines free and accessible worldwide. The Center stepped in with the organizing, funding, strategy, and creativity needed to launch this global effort, bringing together over 500 people from 29 countries to collaborate.

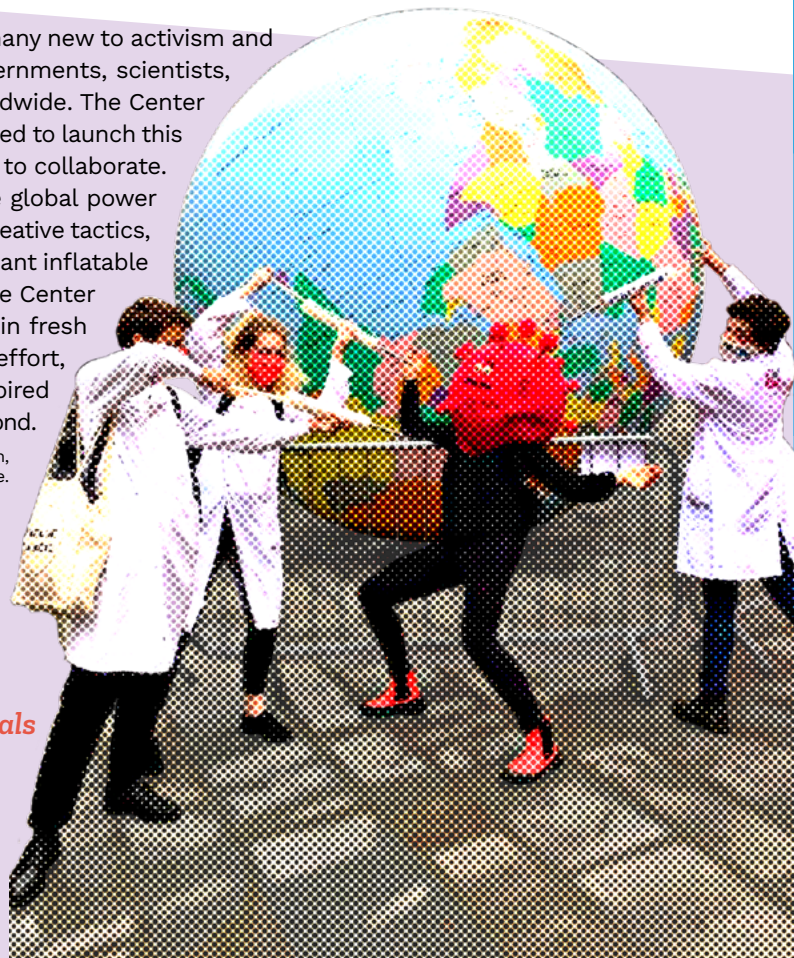
Participants learned about health inequities, how to influence global power structures, and how to build impactful campaigns. They deployed creative tactics, from children's books, trading cards, songs, and performances to giant inflatable syringes and art exhibits. With in-person protests off the table, the Center helped activists get creative with online organizing and brought in fresh ideas that shook up the usual ways of doing things. This global effort, spanning time zones and disciplines, fostered lasting skills and inspired many participants to continue advocacy work in public health and beyond.

*London Carnival March for a People's Vaccine, London,
United Kingdom (2020). Photo by UK Free the Vaccine.*

You don't want to do the same thing over and over again. I think the Center provides the intangible of giving you permission to do something that doesn't look like the things that came before.

The go-to doesn't have to be protest in a traditional-looking form. There are many ways to reach the goals that you set yourselves, you know? And I do think it changes the frame, just the way you see things.

— **Merith Basey**, Executive Director of
Patients for Affordable Drugs, USA



TRANS FORM ATIVE

The Center for Artistic Activism brings about social change by serving social change agents.

Our impact is measured by how we impact others. This transformative impact framework helps us understand the change we instill, through our training, mentorship, research, and support.

TRAINEE

COHORT OF
TRAINEES

TRAINEE'S
ORGANIZATION

TRAINEE'S
COMMUNITY
OF PRACTICE

TRAINEE'S
COMMUNITY
AND/OR
CONSTITUENCY

SOCIAL
CHANGE

IMPACT FRAME WORK

Our research demonstrates that alumni who undergo training utilize these skills in various impactful ways, spreading their influence across diverse communities. Some collaborate by exchanging ideas and resources with fellow trainees, while others integrate these skills within their organizations. Many also extend these tools to their local communities, inspiring and empowering other activists and groups to advocate for change.

8 TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICES THAT HELP PEOPLE ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

By analyzing copious amounts of data gathered by formal surveys, in-depth interviews, workshop feedback, and short solicited statements from fifteen years of C4AA alumni, themes appeared, and reappeared, in how people described how working with the Center had impacted them, their organizations, and the work they did. Beginning with thirty such themes, we collapsed these into the eight categories below.

One of C4AA's teachings is to tap into our individual and collective imagination and encourage expanding our minds with an open, What if? This has been the framework for pretty much every community-engaged art project I've led since that workshop.

— **Cecelia Lim**, Queens Neighborhood United, USA

1. IMAGINATION

People who work in advocacy frequently fixate on what they want to change. This is important, but what is often neglected is an inspiring vision of the solution. C4AA strengthens the capacity to not only critique what is wrong but to dream of what a better world might be. **Alumni reported that their capacity to imagine was greatly strengthened at both a personal and organizational level and that this imagination carried over into the tactics they used in the field.** These tactics included creating imaginary worlds, sometimes based on popular fantasies, to provide the communities they work within what a new world might look and feel like in order to inspire them to build it in the present: making the impossible, possible.

I absolutely love the C4AA idea of Utopia... imagining a world where you have already succeeded... changing people's mindset, inspiring them, providing direction, and stimulating a different way of seeing and feeling.

— **Srboohie Abajian**,
Artistic Activist, USA

It was insane when I was literally told the term 'artistic activism' the first time. I was like, ding dong. Like, what? Like, literally, why didn't I think of this? It really helped define my character professionally as an activist.

— **Kelsye Adams**, Organizing Director, DC Vote

2. INNOVATION

We recognize that to create a guide for the rest of the department; they really need to understand the creative process. So I'm hosting Lunch and Learns with my colleagues, where they take past projects and apply the creative process to them.... I've been seeing lots of light bulbs go off.

— **Roshani Thakore**,
Director, Community
Engagement &
Culture Program,
Atlanta Regional
Commission, USA

All activists, artists, and advocacy organizations get stuck in ruts. What worked before is tried repeatedly, even when it no longer works. Again and again, **our alumni reported that C4AA helped them to break out of these ruts by embracing risk and surprise and providing exercises designed to get them thinking "out of the box."** As a result, they introduced creative innovation into their organizations and campaigns to push them in new directions. At both an organizational and professional level, people reported that C4AA was able to move them to the "next level."

It provides a framework, a set of languages and tools to craft an intervention that could provoke thoughts.

It provided a new lens to view activism.

It encouraged me to create actions that go beyond just telling the truth.

— **Elsa So Leung Yan**, Regional Action Manager,
Greenpeace East Asia, Hong Kong

3. EMOTION

Social movement scholars have proved that people become engaged, and stay engaged, in advocacy work for emotional reasons: because they feel something is wrong and the world could be better. Yet, all too often, appeals for social change are made only to the mind, while the heart and soul are neglected. **By stressing the affective powers of the arts, our alumni reported that the C4AA taught them how artistic approaches to activism stir, capture, articulate, and generate emotions that link people to issues, and then to apply these powers to their campaigns in concrete ways.** They also mentioned how the Center taught them to **discover the joy and excitement of creativity in the service of social change**, and how this joy was incorporated into their own activist work and their engagement with the public.

*A lot of advocacy here in Central Florida revolves around trauma.
But we did something different. We created spaces for people to share experiences
while engaging in collective art-making and joyful, open conversations.
It brought healing and connection in ways that traditional approaches don't.*
— **Carlos “Carlitos” Xavier Díaz Rodríguez**, Community Organizer, HIV Justice, QLatinx

*Realizing the potency of
emotions when it comes to
changing minds was a big game-
changer for me and how
I approach my work and the world.
It's not enough to prove a point,
but in order to change yourself
and the world, we gotta feel.*
— **Helena Kore**, Instructor, Grand
Rapids Community College, USA

4. STRATEGY

While artistic activism expands imaginations, stimulates innovation, and embraces emotion, it needs thoughtful strategic planning to be socially impactful. Our alumni frequently describe how the Center helped to boost the effect of their affective projects by clarifying goals, specifying concrete objectives, identifying audiences, and considering their motivations. By building and testing prototypes and critically reflecting upon and redirecting their strategies, **they reported being better able to leverage their creativity into campaigns that have real-world impact.** C4AA taught them to be rational about using the irrational.

*C4AA showed me
that creativity
isn't just about
'going with the flow'—
it's about
having a process.
That idea
applies not only to
artistic activism
but to all
civic engagement.*

— **Jeanine Abrams McLean**,
President of Fair Count, USA

*I was always struggling to make our activism creative,
and that training helped a lot because
it gave us a methodology.
The most valuable aspect is that we always forget
the part of engaging audiences
in our actions, so that's helped a lot
in every plan of action we have made since then.*

— **Migen Qiraxhi**, Civil Society Advocate, Albania

5. ASSESSMENT

A great deal of art and activism done in the name of social change is based upon magical thinking. An artwork is created, an action is staged and — poof! — change happens. Usually, however, it does not. C4AA's emphasis on the assessment of the impact of artistic activism, through our training, mentoring, and by developing an “æffect assessment methodology” has resulted in an **increased awareness amongst our alumni in the importance of assessment.** By building assessment into the planning of projects from the start, and stressing testing, reflection, and iteration throughout, our alumni report that they now look at assessment more holistically. By providing tools and resources, C4AA gave them the means to do this assessment themselves. People also report a change in their attitudes: assessment isn't just something performed to please the funder; it's done for the good of their projects.

I loved the Free the Vaccine campaign and how it creatively brought together activists (and those who might not have thought of themselves as 'activists') from all over the world, working in unity.

— **Marlise Richter,**
Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa

A fantastic step-by-step guide to planning artistic interventions that have impact — and to help you assess whether you have met your goals.

— **Brett Davidson,** Former Director of the
Media and Narratives Division of the
Open Society Public Health Program, USA

*We prototyped the training,
and while it went fairly well,
we had low turnout.*

*That's when we decided to switch our methods
and tactics to virtual game nights
and partnerships with streamers.
I really believe that shift happened because of the
training I received from the Center
and the guidance to reflect after prototyping
and consider alternative approaches.*

— **Sara Mortensen,** Development Director,
Fandom Forward, USA

6. COMMUNITY

It can be lonely trying to change the world. You are often at odds with those around you and you lose more often than you win. Practicing unorthodox forms of arts and activism, like artistic activism, compounds this alienation. One of the themes that our alumni kept returning to is how the **C4AA connected them with like-minded individuals**, whether in a room or around the world, through trainings, collaborative projects, research groups, book clubs, online seminars, webinars, office hours. Through the C4AA they felt like they were part of a community where they truly belonged.

7. POLLINATION

It is said that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery, and one of the things that our alumni reported frequently is how they used parts of C4AA trainings, tools, resources and methodologies. Our alumni reproduce and repurpose our materials for their own trainings, resources, and organizations. What our alumni did with C4AA resources was a great deal more than imitate: **they adopted what worked for them and adapted it for their own needs and contexts, giving birth to new forms and definitions of artistic activism as they spread ideas and methods from one place to the next.**

In Ghana some of the guys within our cohort are going on and being amazingly bold. The impact beyond that, beyond the trainees, is really seen, and you can really, really feel it. Even myself, I've gone to apply this in various aspects of my life.

— **Prince Andrew Ardayfio**, Creative Art Director, TransArt Global, Ghana

For a lot of [organizations], when they heard of activism, it was more about always hitting the streets and doing violent protests. I was able to walk them through a different approach to what activism truly is, and based on that, they bought into a lot of ideas that I proposed that work and that they could adapt.

— **Ewura Adams Karim**,
Co-Founder and Executive Director,
Maltiti Foundation, Ghana

The fact that planning an event or an action for Greenpeace is actually a creative design process, is something that I took from the Center. I have taken that language and embedded it in our training manuals. For instance, we have a new section in the training about creativity. That is pretty much taken as it is in the training module of the Center.

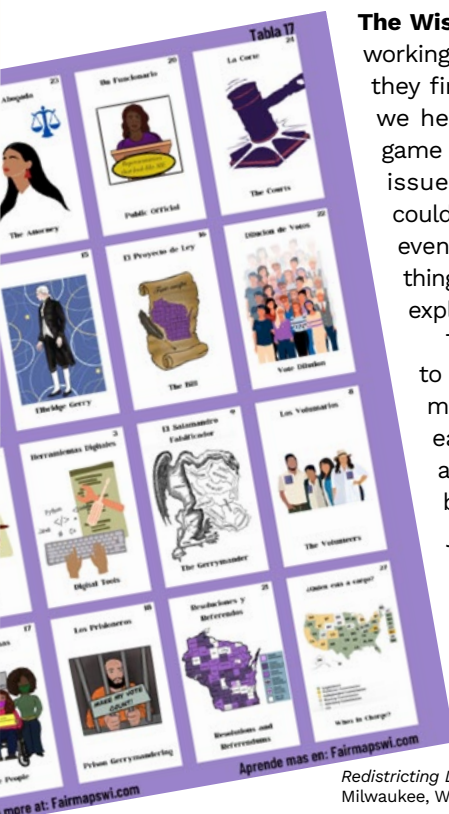
— **Pushpinder Singh**,
Global Actions Capacity
Development Manager,
Greenpeace, Netherlands

8. ÆFFECT

Combining art and activism can be powerful. It can also be difficult as art and activism do different work in the world. Art generates affect, while activism is aimed toward effect. Combining the affective — or emotional — power of the arts with the effective — or directly impactful — capabilities of activism, in what we call “æffect,” is something our alumni reported as one of the most important things they gained from working with the C4AA. Sometimes this was something new: artists learning how to be strategic about the impact of their creative work, or activists discovering how to bring in culture and creativity to their campaigns. But even those who had been practicing artistic activism learned something from the Center. C4AA offered clarification of what they had been doing, validation that what they had been doing was important, and confidence to continue to develop their practice.

USA

DEMOCRACY CAMPAIGN



The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign described working with the C4AA as a game-changer. When they first got involved with the Center in 2021, we helped them create a redistricting Loteria game to engage the community on crucial local issues. “Having this creative tool meant we could connect more meaningfully with people at events, moving beyond typical tabling to something fun and educational that stuck with them,” explained the coordinator for this project.

The Center’s approach encouraged them to embrace creativity and set clear goals that made planning and implementation so much easier. Trainees learned new ways to think about activism — not just as serious work but as something that could be creative and joyful, even whimsical. Through the Center’s support, they gained new followers, especially among younger and BIPOC communities, strengthening their reach and impact in ways that continue to build long-term connections.

Redistricting Loteria,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin (2021).

*We gained
an entire new following...
a younger pool of people that were also
BIPOC. We saw increments in how
people were being involved at
Democracy Campaign that weren’t
our traditional members.*

— **Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, USA**



Photo by Joe Brusky.

Ghana

EWURA ADAMS

Ewura Adams Karim, a theater for development professional and social behavioral change expert in Ghana, first engaged with the Center in 2019 at the Art Action Academy in Senegal. The training, centered on anti-corruption and non-traditional approaches, profoundly influenced his work, sparking creative strategies for social impact. Ewura applied these methods to pressing issues like illegal mining in Ghana, using subtle artistic pieces to inspire dialogue without directly naming individuals, sparking essential online conversations.

Stolen Future Project. Boti forest, Ghana (2021).
Photo by Ewura Adams Karim.

*The training was phenomenal.
It opened doors and inspired
innovative approaches in
Ghana’s activist landscape.*

— **Ewura Adams**, Co-Founder and Executive
Director, Maltiti Foundation, Ghana

The training also strengthened Ewura’s role as a leader and educator. He later received a grant to train 30 activists in C4AA’s methods and integrated these approaches into his theater lectures at the University of Ghana. He describes that the experience opened doors and inspired innovative approaches in Ghana’s activist landscape. Ewura credits C4AA with providing tools that continue to drive impactful, creative change in his community.



METHODOLOGY

Answering the seemingly simple question of the Center for Artistic Activism's impact was daunting. C4AA has worked with over 4000 individuals and their organizations in over 15 years. These people then went on to work on tens of thousands of projects and campaigns around the world. Collecting, organizing, and analyzing the data for this report took the better part of a year.

We started with the numbers, **gathering data** on all in-person and online workshops organized by the Center from 2009 to 2024, listing alumni through the years, and data about their nationalities. We parsed over 160 sessions and datasets and arrived at numbers that provide a global overview of the Center's reach. We needed to get to know the people behind the numbers to assess the impact that all the Center's training and workshops, mentoring and research, tools, and resources were having. To this end, we:

- Designed and distributed **detailed surveys** to our alumni.
- Sent emails **soliciting responses** to the question, "How has any of the material we taught impacted how you work?"
- **Collected evaluations** at the end of workshops and programs, asking for participant's reflections.
- Conducted **in-depth one-on-one interviews** with a select group of people we had worked with extensively over the years.

We then analyzed these people's responses, looking for patterns and repeating themes. In the end, we arrived at thirty such key themes we used to code our interviews:

1. Objectives
2. Planning
3. Testing/Iteration
4. Joy!
5. Emotion/Affect
6. Play/Fun
7. Community/Belonging
8. Validation/Confidence
9. Audiences
10. Spectacle
11. Dreaming/Utopia/Impossible
12. Creativity
13. Innovation
14. Expanding Horizons
15. Surprise
16. Risk
17. Impact/Assessment/Results
18. Research
19. Art and Activism
20. Emulation/Expansion
21. Tools/Resources
22. Support (financial, tactical, etc.)
23. Collaboration
24. Pop Culture
25. Clarification
26. Excitement
27. Method/Process
28. Contextualization
29. Professional Development
30. Application

We then grouped these themes into eight categories, acknowledging that some themes, depending upon their inflection, might appear in more than one category:

Imagination: Dreaming/Utopia/Impossible, Creativity, Spectacle, Expanding Horizons, Pop Culture

Innovation: Innovation, Surprise, Risk, Creativity, Method/Process, Context, Professional Development

Strategy: Planning, Objectives, Audiences, Research, Support (financial, tactical, etc), Testing/Iteration, Clarification, Method/Process, Context, Application

Assessment: Testing/Iteration, Impact/Assessment/Results, Research

Pollination: Emulation/Expansion, Tools/Resources, Support, Professional Development

Community: Community/Belonging, Collaboration

Emotion: Emotion/Affect, Joy!, Play/Fun, Excitement

Effect: Art and Activism, Validation/Confidence, Clarification

From these categories we began to get a coherent picture of how the Center for Artistic Activism has impacted advocates, who then use what they have learned to set their goals, plan their strategies, devise their tactics, and engage their communities, in order to have an impact on the world.

STRATEGY

OBJECTIVE

TACTIC

OBJECTIVE

TACTIC

GOAL

STRATEGY

OBJECTIVE

GOAL



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ARTISTIC ACTIVISM



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