



# 35 YEARS

## of amplifying voices for change

2023 Annual Letter to Stakeholders



Metropolitan Group

la fuerza de la voz • the power of voice

February 14, 2024

**Dear Friends and Stakeholders,**

As Metropolitan Group (MG/ISMG) begins our 36<sup>th</sup> year, we are more committed than ever to supporting and working in partnership with change agents to respond to truly global challenges, and to directly impact and drive needed changes on issues that require collective action and significant shifts in norms and public will.

Across sectors and across geographies the need to create proactive narratives, social expectations, and systemic changes that center fairness, freedom, equity, justice, and peace is profound. We all need solutions we can work toward while we also work to effectively counter rising authoritarianism, hyperpolarization, the use of fear and othering, and attacks on information integrity. We see this combined work of building up just solutions while robustly pushing back on injustice in the work of our clients and the communities they serve every day.

We see **the power of voice** and its ability to activate change in the work of advocates, civil society organizations, dedicated public servants, artists, and advocates.

MG/ISMG is privileged to work with many of these change agents. This year, we partnered with our clients to: **bolster democratic values and institutions, to protect civic space and freedom of expression, to advance environmental justice, to increase gender equity, to address structural racism and health, to accelerate climate smart agriculture and biodiversity conservation, to support strong and inclusive cultures in organizations to increase their impact**, and so much more.

This 35<sup>th</sup> annual letter to stakeholders shares updates on our team and stories of our clients' work and impact. As we begin our 36<sup>th</sup> year of social impact work, we are focused and committed to the shared mission of advancing public health, environmental sustainability, and social justice. We are privileged and excited to collaborate with you on this journey.

On behalf of the entire MG/ISMG team, we look forward to partnering with you to advance transformative change by amplifying the power of voice.

**In commitment and community,**



**Eric Friedenwald-Fishman**

CEO/Creative Director/Founder



**Yvonne Tengwall**

Chief Operating Officer/Principal



**Al Machemehl**

Chief Financial Officer/Principal



**Maria Elena Campisteguy**

Senior Executive Vice President/Principal



**Kevin T. Kirkpatrick**

Senior Executive Vice President/Principal



**14 de febrero de 2024**

**Estimados amigos y socios,**

A medida que en Metropolitan Group (MG/ ISMG) comenzamos nuestro año 36, estamos comprometidos más que nunca a apoyar y trabajar junto con agentes de cambio para lograr un impacto directo e impulsar la transformación necesaria en las normas, acción colectiva y en la voluntad pública que afectan temas que representan desafíos globales.

En todos los sectores y en todas las geografías existe una profunda necesidad de crear narrativas proactivas, expectativas sociales y cambios sistémicos que se centren en la imparcialidad, la libertad, la equidad, la justicia y la paz. Todos necesitamos soluciones para trabajar en contrarrestar eficazmente el creciente autoritarismo, la hiperpolarización, el uso del miedo y la marginación, y los ataques a la integridad de la información. En la labor diaria de nuestros clientes y de las comunidades a las que sirven, vemos el esfuerzo por construir soluciones justas al tiempo que se lucha enérgicamente contra la injusticia.

En el trabajo de defensores, organizaciones de la sociedad civil, funcionarios públicos dedicados y artistas vemos reflejado **la fuerza de la voz** y su capacidad para activar el cambio.

MG/ISMG tiene el privilegio de trabajar con muchos de estos agentes de cambio. Este año, nos hemos unido con nuestros clientes para: **reforzar los valores y las instituciones democráticas; proteger el espacio cívico y la libertad de expresión; promover la justicia ambiental, aumentar la igualdad de género, abordar el racismo estructural y la salud; acelerar la agricultura climáticamente inteligente y la conservación de la biodiversidad; y apoyar las organizaciones con culturas fuertes e inclusivas para que puedan aumentar su impacto**, y mucho más.

Esta carta anual número 35 dirigida a los grupos de interés comparte información actualizada sobre nuestro equipo e historias del trabajo y el impacto de nuestros clientes. Al comenzar nuestro año 36 de trabajo en impacto social, estamos centrados y comprometidos con la misión compartida de

promover la salud pública, la sostenibilidad medioambiental y la justicia social. Nos sentimos privilegiados y entusiasmados de colaborar con ustedes en este viaje.

En nombre de todo el equipo de MG/ ISMG, esperamos continuar colaborando con ustedes para promover un cambio transformador y seguir ampliando el poder de la voz.

**En compromiso y comunidad.**





# MEET JAY L. KNOTT, MG'S NEW PRESIDENT

We are thrilled to announce that **Jay L. Knott** recently joined Metropolitan Group (MG) as our new president. He will help MG and our sister company, Impacto Social Metropolitan Group (ISMG), significantly increase our impact, invest in our team and capabilities, spark innovation across our practice areas, and build the systems and culture to best advance the transformative changes that are critical to our clients and the communities they serve.

Jay brings incredible leadership experience from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. He led the growth of a global consulting and initiative implementation

firm, worked internationally in diverse and challenging contexts, and focused on issues that intersect our three focus areas (public health, environment and sustainability, and social justice).

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**“In a world where discord and divisiveness continue rising, and at a time when data and evidence alone are often insufficient to shift the debate, I am so happy to join my talented colleagues at Metropolitan Group. With our team of advocates, designers, storytellers, and strategists, MG/ISMG is a leader in crafting strategic and creative services to bring people together, amplify the voice of change agents, and advance social justice missions to build a just and more sustainable world.”—Jay L. Knott**

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Jay recently served as chief operating officer of the Environmental Defense Fund. For a period of 10 years, he served as chief business officer at Abt Associates, a global leader in health, social-environmental policy, and international development. Jay had a successful 20-plus-year career as a leader at USAID, including roles as mission director in Jordan and Mozambique and deputy director in Ghana. Prior to joining USAID, Jay was a practicing attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice, focusing on the enforcement of environmental laws. Jay currently serves on the boards of the Society for International Development (U.S. chapter) and Results for Development. He is multilingual and speaks French, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Please join us in welcoming Jay as part of the shared effort with clients and partners, stakeholders, and communities to create a more just and sustainable world.



# NEW CHANGE AGENTS

In 2023, we welcomed incredible change agents to our team.

Meet our amazing new colleagues, each bringing deep technical expertise and commitment to authentic engagement and collaboration for impact advancing social change.



**Carlos Paz**  
project manager



**Melissa Navas**  
vice president, with a focus  
on public health



**Dr. Alejandro Vélez Salas**  
vice president and  
Mexico City lead



**Ashley Bloom Royal**  
vice president of  
project management



**Rebecca Gerber**  
vice president, with a  
focus on digital strategy



**Sarah Sahlaney**  
vice president, with a focus  
on global challenges



**Corinne Nakamura-Rybak**  
executive vice president of  
visual communication



**Haim Malka**  
executive vice president



**Kristin Gimbel**  
executive vice president

# PROMOTIONS IN 2023

Last year MG/ISMG landed high impact work in all of our priority focus areas: **environment and sustainability, public health, and social justice**. In addition, we invested in helping our team members grow and build their professional expertise and capacity.

Our entire team of **over 60 change agents** continued to hone their skills, explore new learnings and collaborate with clients to advance social impact.

Meet our full team at [metgroup.com/our-team](https://metgroup.com/our-team).





# IMPACT STORIES WITH OUR CLIENTS

## Creating campaigns to support women agriculture workers in Tunisia

To enable fair working conditions for women agriculture workers in Tunisia, MG/ISMG worked in partnership with two rural, women-led civil society organizations, **AFRJ** and **UNFTK**, in the co-creation and implementation of a social and behavior change (SBC) strategy to advance a narrative shift that centered women as strong and critical contributors. As part of this work, a successful SBC communication campaign, **Felha**, was launched based on **tested messages** that elevated the contributions of these women to their country. We also instituted a robust stakeholder engagement process, plus train-the-trainer and self-advocacy workshops for women agriculture workers. This work was generously supported by the **U.S. Agency for International Development** (USAID) and was facilitated via contract with Vistant.



## Structural racism: removing the structural barriers to health and wellbeing

“To reach a Culture of Health that provides everyone in America a fair and just opportunity for health and wellbeing, we must identify, understand, confront, and remove the structural barriers to health and wellbeing, including racism, powerlessness, discrimination, and their consequences.” This statement anchors a **resource page** on **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s** (RWJF) website that offers durable and persuasive messages, metaphors, and visual cues to communicate about the connection between racism and health, the persistent structural barriers to a Culture of Health, and the opportunity to build new bridges in place of barriers. MG has been a collaborator in the research and message development that informs this work, and in 2023, our team created an **animated video** that links message and visual metaphor, and co-presented trainings for RWJF grantees. The video and tools are free and available for broad use. This work was done in partnership with Lake Research Partners.





## Accelerating biodiversity conservation through Earth observation and collaboration

MG is proud to partner with the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration** (NASA) as it designs and launches a new biodiversity initiative called Catalyst ([catalyst4conservation.org](https://catalyst4conservation.org)). Catalyst aims to accelerate biodiversity conservation at a large scale, starting in the state of California, by broadening and diversifying the groups with access to and capacity to apply NASA information in their decision-making. Catalyst will also support increased collaboration across ecosystems, sectors, and disciplines; invest in promising new solutions; and produce dynamic media to inspire deepened conservation investments—all fueled by knowledge of the Earth as a system.



## Examining migration narratives in northern Central America

A set of interconnected yet often contradictory narratives helps explain how migration trends in northern Central America are evolving and why policymakers in the region and the U.S. are struggling to keep up with shifting migration dynamics. Government narratives primarily seek to deter migration, yet they are often misaligned with migrants' reasons for leaving. At the same time, narratives in many local communities portray emigration as an economic lifeline, rite of passage, and source of pride. A new report, **Migration Narratives in Northern Central America: How Competing Stories Shape Policy and Public Opinion in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador**, examines narratives in northern Central America from 2018 to 2022, as well as ones from the U.S. and Mexico focused on the region. **The Migration Narratives Initiative** is a collaboration between MG/ISMG, Migration Policy Institute, National Immigration Forum, and RAND. This research was funded by Humanity United.





## Retaining vital health benefits for people living in Oregon

More than 1 million people in Oregon were at risk of losing their Oregon Health Plan (OHP) benefits at the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency. To help them keep covered, MG worked with the **Oregon Health Authority** (OHA) and the **Oregon Department of Human Services** on a community-informed statewide communications campaign. Our team worked alongside OHA's community network and created new partnerships with community advisors representing 19 unique and intersecting priority populations to create a culturally responsive messaging campaign that reached people receiving Medicaid benefits. After launching **Keep Covered** in 14 languages last spring, OHA has reported that as of early 2024 more than 86% of benefit recipients have been successfully renewed through this process, which runs through 2024, positioning Oregon as the second-ranked state in the nation for percentage of renewals. In addition, to continue improving communication with OHP members, MG worked with OHA to create a new handbook for people with a specific type of coverage, centering cultural and linguistic needs and using an updated transcreation process. English and Spanish language handbooks debut in early 2024, followed by additional languages, and supplemental web, video, and audiobook resources.



## Improving air quality in frontline Environmental Justice communities

**The Bay Area Air Quality Management District** is in the process of incorporating a deeper consideration of environmental justice (EJ) at all levels of the organization, with the goal of improving air quality in frontline EJ communities with the most air pollution in the Bay Area. MG is facilitating a substantive dialogue between the air district and its community advisory council that will result in the development of a comprehensive EJ Action Plan with strategies and actions to guide the air district's work going forward. This work will impact the top-to-bottom operations of the air district through incorporation into its strategic plan and will also impact air quality outcomes for EJ communities throughout the Bay Area. This process will present the air district with a key opportunity to align its strategic goals with EJ and to institutionalize the changes communities are seeking.





## Countering corruption through social and behavior change (SBC)

Corruption negatively impacts millions of lives across the globe. Petty corruption, such as bribery or cronyism, erodes trust in basic services and institutions, while large-scale kleptocracy steals public resources meant to deliver critical services to communities in need. **USAID** commissioned MG/ISMG to conduct research on the use of SBC approaches in multiple countries to address social norms and behaviors related to corruption, and develop recommendations on how these approaches might be used to improve current and future anti-corruption activities. Too often, anti-corruption efforts focus exclusively on technical and policy solutions. MG found that addressing the social norms, dominant narratives, and enabling environments that allow corruption to flourish is a need SBC can help meet. We also found that this approach is currently poorly understood and underutilized. Despite this, we found that many anti-corruption efforts do utilize some SBC elements, such as stakeholder-centric design, iterative implementation, and the use of hope-based narratives. [Download the final analysis report](#) or the two-page brief to learn more. This project was facilitated via a contract with Vistant.



## Civil society organizations programs that are working to advance climate justice and human rights

Civil society organizations (CSOs) often communicate without prioritizing stakeholders and, most importantly, without the benefit of research to know what values are motivating and what barriers need to be addressed to change behaviors. MG/ISMG delivered strategic communications services in a capacity building program, including direct technical assistance to support CSO research and development of social and behavior change communication campaigns. This work supported efforts to advance programs connected to climate justice, children, migrant and women's rights, transparency and accountability, access to justice, and civic participation. This work was part of an activity implemented by **Making Cents International** and **Development Professionals**.





## Expanding perceptions of leadership

Leadership takes many forms and is an adaptive, relational practice. This view of leadership—expansive, relevant, and responsive—anchors a **six-article series** in Stanford Social Innovation Review that offers insights about how leadership programming, and workplace practices and cultures, can better embrace all leadership approaches to advance systemic change. This series, a highlight of our ongoing work with **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's** Leadership for Better Health, includes the voices of grantees, collaborators, and RWJF staff. SSIR editors named one of the articles, "**Leading Together for Systems Change**" by Sida Ly-Xiong, the No. 1 story that inspired them in 2023.

## Bolstering community capacity to secure federal infrastructure investments

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal (the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to invest in long-standing needs in Black, brown, and Indigenous communities that have historically endured the burden of national investments in infrastructure and rarely the benefit. MG continues our partnership with the **Deep South Center for Environmental Justice** to build the capacity of frontline community organizations to deepen organizational readiness, develop a powerful case for investment, build relationships with key stakeholders, and effectively navigate federal and local funding processes.

## Advancing climate justice in a divided nation

The evidence is clear. Our worsening climate is bad for our health, safety, and prosperity—shortening life spans, threatening our communities and infrastructure, and displacing people and families. This impacts all of us, but not in the same ways. The challenges are compounded for people and communities of color who have experienced generations of policies and practices that unfairly expose us/them to risks. Working together with **The Kresge Foundation** and its Climate Change, Health and Equity grantee partners, MG facilitated a grassroots approach to message framing. This resulted in messaging designed to aid community advocates, health care institutions, and practitioners in talking about structural racism with their elected officials, including those who are not yet ready to do so. Through ongoing communication technical assistance, MG is helping Kresge's grantee partners apply this messaging to their context as they earn wins that prevent new unjust policies from passing and advance just policies in their wake.





## Strengthening civil society in Mexico and Central America

With the support of the **Ford Foundation**, MG/ISMG worked with organizations, collectives and movements in Mexico and Central America to strengthen their strategic communication capacities by creating and introducing concepts and tools in workshops and work sessions. We also accompanied them in applying the tools in their communications to create impact in their work on human rights and justice, the defense of judicial power, gender equality, and the protection of civic space.



## Creating a strategic framework for justice and equity programming

The **Environmental Defense Fund** (EDF) created the Justice and Equity Program Office to systematically integrate justice and equity principles into its internal processes and external mission areas. MG synthesized and distilled the Justice and Equity Program's extensive research, translating the results into a strategic framework. The impact of this work is that it will strengthen EDF's to accelerate the most effective climate adaptation and mitigation solutions on a large scale, while also relieving environmental burdens, preventing further harms, and increasing benefits and opportunities for communities of color, low-income, and Indigenous populations who are fighting environmental threats caused by industrial pollution and climate change.





## Building public will to prevent child sexual abuse

Having adopted a bold new strategic vision to prevent child sexual abuse, **Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas (CACTX)** contracted with MG to support its efforts to encourage adoption of a public health approach that recognizes the need for detection and response, but increasingly focuses on prevention. In 2023, MG collaborated with CACTX—and engaged an advisory panel of cross-disciplinary experts and those with a lived experience of child sexual abuse—to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with preventing child sexual abuse in Texas. Our work included focus groups and a statewide survey. Drawing on these insights, MG developed, tested, and refined a narrative and messaging story arc to be deployed in a multiyear public will building campaign, which was also developed by MG. Currently, MG is preparing to test the public will building strategy and messaging through a set of pilots across Texas to be undertaken in partnership with four Children's Advocacy Centers across the state.



## Shared values and solutions with decision-makers

Advocates can face both strategic and personal challenges when engaging with elected officials who hold differing views on public health policies. Finding and building on shared values and common ground can advance solutions, build longer-term understanding and collaboration, and support advocates to care for their own needs, feelings, and sense of safety. Our research-driven guide, **Finding Commonalities and Solutions With Decision-Makers**, and training helps advocates assess decision-makers' mindsets and priorities, and explore, in less polarizing ways, policies that support children and families. Specific modules provide customized messaging for prenatal-to-three policies and local decision-making. This is a **Voices for Healthy Kids** initiative.



# THANK YOU TO OUR 2023 CLIENTS



# EXCHANGING IDEAS

Every year, thought leaders at MG/ISMG explore new ideas, create new models, and test existing ones by applying them to our work. Our team shares their lived experience, expertise, learning approach, and points of view through: hosting convenings, public speaking, articles, media interviews, podcasts, civic participation, leadership, and service.

Click the images on this page to learn more and visit our [Ideas](#) page to find articles, tools, and resources.



**Advancing the Rights of Women Agriculture Workers Across Tunisia.**  
This project was funded by USAID and facilitated via a contract with Vistant.



**How Competing Stories Shape Policy and Public Opinion.** This research was funded by Humanity United.



**NASA's Catalyst: Accelerating Biodiversity Conservation through Earth Observation and Collaboration.**



**Finding Commonalities and Solutions With Decision-Makers.** This is a Voices for Healthy Kids initiative.



**Countering Corruption Through SBC.** Commissioned by USAID and facilitated via Vistant.

# CONVENING TOGETHER

MG/ISMG hosted a number of convenings to bring together change agents to explore current trends, issues, opportunities, innovations, and approaches:



## ***Narrativa por la Justicia: Para una Agenda Contra la Impunidad en México***

Colaboratoria presenta una investigación para construir una agenda contra la impunidad en México.



## ***First, Do No Harm: Overcoming Centuries of Legitimate Medical Mistrust***

This presentation by Delma Jackson III explores the history and contemporary manifestations of systemic racism in medicine and public health policies.



## ***What Has Cap-and-Trade Done For Us Lately?***

A discussion with Vernice Miller-Travis and Jared Snyder on the benefits and drawbacks of cap-and-trade and the potential of cap-and-invest as an alternative model.



## ***Narrative and Social Change Convening at TPWB***

We welcomed 20 narrative experts (practitioners, researchers, funders, and community organizers) to gather and confab on new learning, models, challenges, and innovations in the applying narrative as a tool for social change.



## ***End-of-year Winter Happy Hour***

We welcomed 80+ community partners, clients, friends, and family to gather change agents and leaders in the Portland region.

We were also thrilled to host mission-aligned events for other organizations to convene and collaborate at The Public Will Building (TPWB) in Portland, including: **Audubon, B Local PDX, the Cart Blocks, Central City Concern, Friends of Green Loop, Multnomah County's Department of County Human Services, New Seasons, North Star Civic Foundation, O'Bryant Square Stakeholders, Oregon Solutions, Partners in Diversity, and the Portland Parks Foundation.**

We are thrilled that **North Star Civic Foundation** has made TPWB its new home and is hosting civic events in our collaboration and convening spaces. Stay tuned as North Star Civic Foundation and MG partner to create the new Collaboration Gym as a gathering space for larger groups at TPWB. Opening spring/summer of 2025.



# JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

As a mission-based **B Corp** that strives to lead with our values, we are committed to leaning into our **Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI)** practice to improve our internal culture. Our hope is to realize and apply powerful learnings, deepen relationships and engagement, and advance collaborative explorations that lead to more equitable policies and practices for all staff. This work is the result of shared leadership from teams, task forces, committees, and affinity and resource groups across MG/ISMG. We continue to apply learnings and unlearning, to support trainings and workshops, and to examine and change policies and practices across all aspects of our organization to improve the lived experience of our team, the way we work with clients and community, and the impact and relevance of our work.



## WE WALK THE TALK

MG lent its voice, and engaged other businesses and organizations to lend theirs, to call for expanding protections related to democratic values, anti-authoritarianism, civic space, LGBTQIA+ rights, addressing homelessness, reproductive rights, gender-based equity, climate issues, gun violence prevention, human rights and conflict resolution, and more.

# BEING OF SERVICE

## In our communities

We are proud of our team's service and dedication as board members and volunteers in the communities in which we live and work. In 2023, our team dedicated time, expertise, and resources to organizations and nonprofits based in the United States and Mexico. A selected list of these organizations includes: **Artists Repertory Theatre, Basic Rights Oregon, Business for a Better Portland, Cascade AIDS Project, CapitalPlus Exchange, Central City Concern, Children's Environmental Health Network, Community Vision, the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, Gay Professional Men of Color DC, Latino Network, Maryland League of Conservation Voters, the Native American Youth and Family Center, Oregon Business for Climate, Oregon School-Based Health Alliance, Partners in Diversity, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Seeding Justice, TASTE for Equity PDX, and Willamette University.**

## Awards and certifications

We were honored that our in-community work was recognized with a number of awards, including the **2023 Real Leaders Impact Award**, which recognizes innovative global businesses committed to improving the well-being of our planet and society; and Founder Eric Friedenwald-Fishman received the **MO 100 Impact CEOs** award, which recognizes business leaders driving positive social and economic impact. MG is also proud to be a **certified B Corp** and ISMG is proud to be **certified Sistema B** meeting the highest global standards for social and environmental responsibility and governance accountability.





# THANK YOU

We are thankful and honored to work with our clients, partner organizations, coalitions, vendors, volunteer leaders and communities to advance equity, health, sustainability, justice, and peace. Together we can:

- **Counter hyperpolarization and support equal human rights for all.**
- **Build currency for narratives that enable shared action and advance freedom, fairness, and fearlessness.**
- **Change systems and structures to advance equity and well-being.**
- **Celebrate and use creative expression to advance social change and make our lives and communities more vibrant.**
- **Amplify the power of voice as a critical lever for social change.**

As always, we hope to collaborate with you, convene with you, build community with you, learn with you, and support your impact initiatives in the year to come.

*- The MB/ISMB Team*

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# STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY AND INNOVATION



Metropolitan Group crafts strategic and creative services to amplify the power of voice of change agents in building a just and sustainable world.  
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