



# 36 YEARS

## of amplifying voices for change

Annual Letter to Stakeholders

February 14, 2025



Metropolitan Group

la fuerza de la voz • the power of voice

**February 14, 2025**

**Dear Friends and Stakeholders,**

As Metropolitan Group (MG/ISMG) begins our 37<sup>th</sup> year, we recognize that one of the most important lessons we have learned from working with change agents is that **together, we can and must do hard things.** Our focus, since our founding, has been to amplify the power of voice to address the challenges and advance the opportunities that create a more just, healthy, and sustainable world.

“Just, healthy, and sustainable” are not catch phrases or empty words to the organizations, movements, and people we stand with every day, nor to our team. They are the conditions, freedoms, and systems necessary for human flourishing. They are required for any community to live without fear and with trust for their neighbors and their government. They are fundamental conditions to fairness; to ensuring vibrant and productive ecosystems; to innovation; and to shared prosperity, stability, and peace. And for millennia they have never been given, but rather, change agents have made great sacrifices to expand opportunity, pluralism, the health of the planet, and the rights that every person and every community deserve.

Today, in our work across the globe and in our home countries, we see hard-won freedoms being eroded, polarization being legitimized, and the narratives of scarcity and fear being

given currency. But, we also see people standing with each other, recognizing the pathway is challenging, and inspiring others to forge forward. We remember and listen to the voices of leaders, movements, and everyday heroes from our history who overcame fear and took on the impossible to change conditions for the next generation. Together, we must take action based upon the needs of our communities today, the debt we owe to those who sacrificed to drive changes, our communities, and our shared future.

The vast majority of people want to live in a more just, healthy, and sustainable world. More than ever, there is a need to advance powerful upstream narratives that bolster the social norms; build public will; and support policy, practice, and culture change that demands these conditions as fundamental. More than ever, there is a need to support and build the advocacy, effective communication, and organizing muscle of change agents in all sectors. More than ever,

there is a need to replace polarization with connection by authentically engaging and building shared purpose rooted in shared values across broad constituencies.

Metropolitan Group is honored to work with organizations, leaders, and movements who are doing this critical work and who double down when the going gets tough. We are all-in to play our part and to leverage the power of strategic communication, intercultural engagement, and organizational strategy and innovation to advance the hard work ahead.

This 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Letter to Stakeholders shares updates and stories of impact from our team and the clients and communities we serve. 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 2025**

**Estimados amigos, amigas, y socios(as),**

En el marco del 37° aniversario de Metropolitan Group (MG/ISMG), reconocemos que una de las lecciones más valiosas que hemos aprendido trabajando con agentes de cambio es que **juntos podemos y debemos hacer cosas difíciles**. Desde nuestros inicios, nos hemos centrado en amplificar el poder de la voz para abordar los retos y avanzar las oportunidades que crean un mundo más justo, saludable, y sostenible.

“Justo, sano y sostenible” no son frases hechas ni palabras vacías para las organizaciones, movimientos, y personas con las que trabajamos cada día, ni para nuestro equipo. Son las condiciones, las libertades y los sistemas necesarios para el desarrollo humano. Son la base para que cualquier comunidad viva sin miedo, confiando en sus vecinos y en su gobierno. También son fundamentales para la equidad; para garantizar ecosistemas vibrantes y productivos; para la innovación; para la prosperidad compartida, la estabilidad, y la paz. A lo largo de la historia, estas condiciones han sido inalcanzables para muchas sociedades. Sin embargo, los agentes de cambio han realizado grandes sacrificios para impulsar transformaciones que amplíen las oportunidades, fortalezcan el pluralismo, protejan la salud del planeta y garanticen los derechos que todas las personas y comunidades merecen.

Hoy, en nuestro trabajo alrededor del mundo y en nuestros propios países, somos testigos de cómo se erosionan las libertades que tanto han costado obtener, cómo se legitima la polarización y cómo las narrativas de la escasez y el miedo ganan terreno. Pero también vemos a personas que se apoyan mutuamente, que reconocen la dificultad del cambio y que inspiran a otras a seguir adelante. Recordamos y escuchamos las voces de líderes, movimientos y héroes de nuestra historia que superaron el miedo y desafiaron lo imposible para transformar las condiciones de las generaciones futuras. Juntos, debemos actuar con base en las necesidades actuales de nuestras comunidades, en la deuda que tenemos con quienes se sacrificaron para impulsar los cambios, y en nuestro futuro común.

La inmensa mayoría de las personas quieren vivir en un mundo más justo, sano y sostenible. Hoy más que nunca, es crucial fomentar narrativas poderosas y progresivas que fortalezcan las normas sociales; construyan la voluntad pública; y respalden el cambio político, práctico, y cultural necesario para que estas condiciones se reconozcan como fundamentales. También es urgente apoyar y desarrollar la defensa, la comunicación eficaz, y la capacidad de

organización de los agentes de cambio en todos los sectores. Del mismo modo, debemos sustituir la polarización por la conexión, fomentando una participación auténtica y construyendo un propósito común basado en valores compartidos por amplios sectores de la sociedad.

En Metropolitan Group nos enorgullece colaborar con organizaciones, líderes y movimientos que impulsan este trabajo esencial y que redoblan esfuerzos cuando las circunstancias se tornan adversas. Estamos plenamente comprometidos a desempeñar nuestro papel y a aprovechar el poder de la comunicación estratégica, el compromiso intercultural, la estrategia organizativa y la innovación para avanzar en la ardua tarea que tenemos por delante.

Esta 37° Carta Anual a nuestros socios provee noticias e historias de impacto de nuestro equipo y de los clientes y comunidades a los que servimos. En nombre de todo el equipo de MG/ISMG, esperamos colaborar con ustedes para promover un cambio transformador amplificando el poder de la voz.





# NARRATIVE CHANGE MODEL

Over decades MG/ISMG has been honored to be among the practitioners developing innovative models to advance social change, including the development and deployment of narratives on a wide range of issues. **In 2024, we were privileged to drive narrative initiatives across five continents on subjects ranging from human rights and democracy to gender equity and addressing structural racism.**

In the course of doing this work, we observed the ways in which narrative was showing up in public discourse on a wide range of political, social, and cultural issues. These observations reinforced our belief that **narratives can be among the most powerful tools to either protect the status quo or promote change.**

Throughout 2024, we engaged with other narrative researchers, practitioners, and innovators, building on the insights we gleaned from a charette we hosted with narrative thought leaders from around the world in late 2023. We also attended conferences and colloquiums—and delivered presentations and led webinars—to both share what we’re doing in this area and learn from the experience of others.

**Drawing on these experiences and insights, we updated our narrative model in late 2024.** Among the revisions we made was to clarify the relationship between narratives, the ecosystems that provide the context in which people are exposed to narrative, and the mindsets that shape people’s receptivity or resistance to narratives. Our model recognizes that no narrative exists in a vacuum. **Narratives are deeply influenced by—and in turn can influence changes in—the**

**social, cultural, environmental, and political ecosystems all around us. Similarly, while the mindsets people hold shape their receptivity or resistance to narratives, narratives can also influence changes in people’s mindsets.**

Our refined approach to narrative also builds on our earlier model in recognizing that the stories that aggregate to create or reinforce narratives are not just conveyed through literal communication, such as oral tradition and social media. Stories are also conveyed through policy, the built environment, individual and collective action, and more. So, it’s critical that social change agents design and deploy narrative strategies that consider not only communication approaches, but also how policies, systems, social norms, and behaviors can convey narrative.

In 2025 and beyond, we look forward to sharing our approach to narrative with social purpose change agents seeking to build a more just, healthy, and sustainable world. **See the Narrative Change Model on the following page and download a copy [HERE](#).**



# NARRATIVES AND THE POWER THEY HOLD TO CHANGE THE WORLD

For those seeking to advance a more just, healthy, and sustainable world, narrative can be one of the most powerful tools. The narratives we accept—and the narratives we reject—reveal something about ourselves, the world we see, and the change we seek to create or the status quo we strive to protect. No narrative exists in a vacuum. It is deeply influenced by—and in turn can influence changes in—the social, cultural, environmental, and political ecosystems all around us. Similarly, while the mindsets people hold shape their receptivity or resistance to narratives, narratives can also influence changes in people's mindsets.

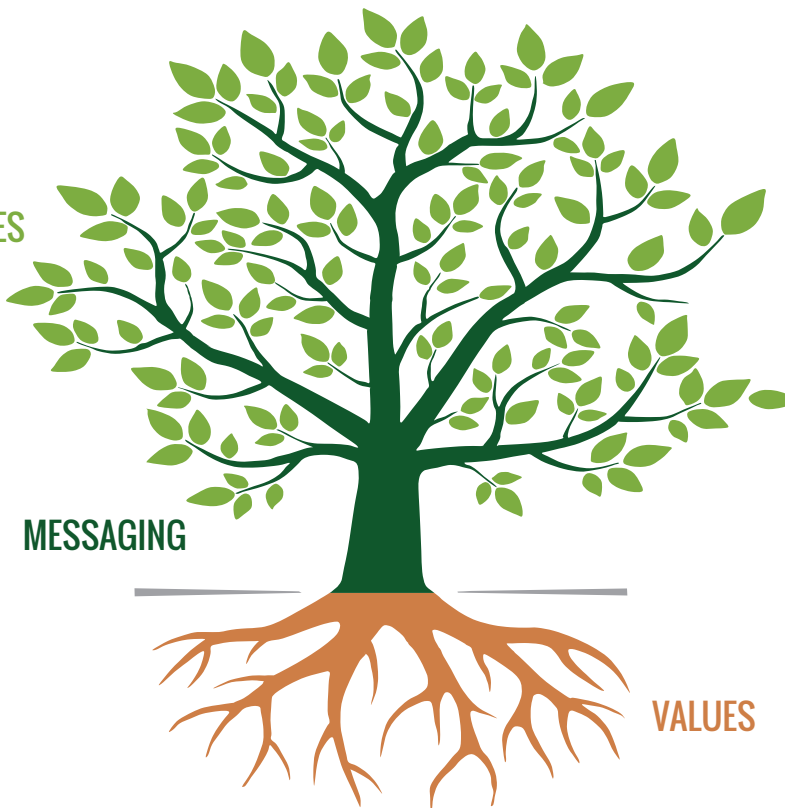
**NARRATIVE** The articulation of a particular way of understanding the world and how it works that shapes what people think, believe, and do.



## ECOSYSTEM

The contexts in which people are exposed to narrative, including their environment, lived experience, and the echo chambers through which they receive information.

## STORIES



## MESSAGING

## VALUES



## MINDSETS

The collection of perspectives and attitudes that shapes people's receptivity or resistance to narratives and to changes in behavior, social norms, or policies/systems.

**STORIES:** What people experience over time both literally (e.g., through social media, oral tradition, etc.) and figuratively (e.g., through policy, the built environment, etc.) that aggregates to create or reinforce a particular narrative.

**MESSAGING:** The core ideas that provide the foundational structure for the narrative.

**VALUES:** The deeply held beliefs that ground the narrative; connect it to what people care about; and increase their likelihood of attention, adoption, and action





# PROMOTIONS IN 2024

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 agency-wide promotions include:



**Ginelle Lazo**  
director



**Max Friedenwald-Fishman**  
senior associate



**Nick Drushella**  
senior director

Our entire team of **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

## A Call to Action for Environmental Justice and Air Quality Management

The Bay Area Air District is moving toward deeper integration of environmental justice values and principles in its work. In partnership with the Air District, MG created an Environmental Justice Action Plan/Call to Action centered on integration of EJ across and throughout the newly adopted five-year Strategic Plan of the Bay Area Air District. This plan represents the culmination of two years of work with the Air District's Community Advisory Council (CAC) and its EJ Policy Ad Hoc Committee, as well as the entire senior leadership of the Air District. Both the new **Strategic Plan** and **A Call To Action** chart an action-oriented path for the Air District to respond to the CAC's **Environmental Justice Priorities** and to broaden its focus from regional air quality management to a more localized, targeted community-based focus of its regulatory actions. MG designed the final report, including incorporating the work of a local artist. **A Call To Action** has been adopted by the CAC and will be presented to the board of directors in early February 2025.



## New arts and cultural plan for the Portland tri-county region

Arts, culture, and creative expression are fundamental to the livability and health of every community. That's why MG, in partnership with Cultural Planning Group, is proud to have helped develop a new arts and cultural plan for the Portland tri-county region. After an 18-month process of research, community engagement, and refinement, the final plan was published in May. There are seven local governments currently participating as a resource. Learn more, and find out how you can get involved, by visiting [ourcreativefuture.org](https://ourcreativefuture.org).







## Bridging science and action: Sharpening NASA Western Water Applications Office's path to impact

MG is partnering with NASA's Western Water Applications Office (WWAO) to reshape their mission, brand, and strategic framework, strengthening their position as a vital bridge between NASA's Earth Science and water managers tackling critical challenges across the Western U.S. Together, we co-created a brand platform rooted in connection, societal benefit, and innovation. MG also guided the team in developing strategic pillars to inform their upcoming strategic planning process. As part of this effort, we worked with the client to rebrand their organization as the Western Water Action Office and crafted a new mission statement to reflect their bold new direction: "Compelled by urgent challenges to our nation's Western water supply, WWAO harnesses the power of NASA to drive innovative solutions that benefit people, the environment, and the economy." The final brand framework equips WWAO to amplify its impact, communicate more effectively, and solidify its leadership in western water management.



## Making Menopause Work: Creating menopause supportive workplaces

In fall 2024, The Menopause Society—the leading menopause resource for 35 years—called on employers across the country to create menopause-supportive workplaces. This shift in policies and practices is a wise move to retain employees, build culture and well-being, and benefit from a multigenerational workforce. MG translated the scientific consensus report behind the recommendation into an easy to use, actionable **Employer Guide**, then worked with The Menopause Society team to promote it via a new microsite, partner outreach, and earned media. Within the first three weeks of launch, the microsite reached 4,885 unique visitors with the guide itself downloaded 751 times.





# IMAGINE OREGON

without Big Tobacco

Let's create it. Together.



## Imagine Oregon Without Big Tobacco

MG worked with Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and its grantees—community-based organizations and county public health departments—to design a new campaign that boldly and joyfully states: Community is important to each of us in our own way, Big Tobacco affects all of our communities, and together we can create a future free from the harms caused by the tobacco industry. The resulting campaign, **Imagine Oregon Without Big Tobacco**, depicts communities' visions through illustrations by Oregon artists, communicated through online videos, radio spots, TV ads, and billboards, as well as local actions by grantees. All ads invite people to [SmokefreeOregon.com](https://www.smokefreeoregon.com) where they can take action with the help of an interactive map that points them to local organizations, share the campaign images and videos, and support loved ones to quit tobacco. The campaign's strong initial results confirm that together, people in Oregon are standing up to Big Tobacco.

MG has been honored to work across OHA on other vital projects including communication support for OHA-funded, community-based partners and local public health authorities; community-informed, culturally-appropriate materials for Oregon Health Plan members; and the initial phase of a cross-agency (with Oregon Department of Human Services) **home-care workforce recruiting effort**.

## Addressing global challenges through democracy narratives

MG/ISMG is currently collaborating on multiple international and domestic narrative research efforts and their application to social and behavioral change with international development agencies and foundations related to strengthening support for democratic principles, including human rights, civic space, gender-inclusive democracy, just migration, freedom of expression, responsive governance, and honest and open government.





## Narrative change in entertainment, arts, and culture

MG supports the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to build narrative change and storytelling capabilities among grantees to illuminate structural racism as a root cause of inequity and amplify promising solutions to overcome barriers to health. This includes supporting research teams to make their findings actionable by key decision-makers and shifting TV, film, theater, and comedy to support more diverse stories, storytellers, and story creators. This work informs action on a wide array of issues, such as reproductive justice, immigrant inclusion, representation, closing the racial wealth gap, state preemption of local policy, and supportive housing, just to name a few.



## Addressing corruption and promoting transparency in El Salvador through democracy narratives

MG/ISMG is currently collaborating with Salvadoran civil society organizations and media outlets to improve their strategic communication capacities and apply values-based narratives that will help them engage with new audiences and explain the implications of corruption in their daily lives, and motivate citizens to contribute, demand, and promote greater transparency, in particular by taking collective action in their own communities.

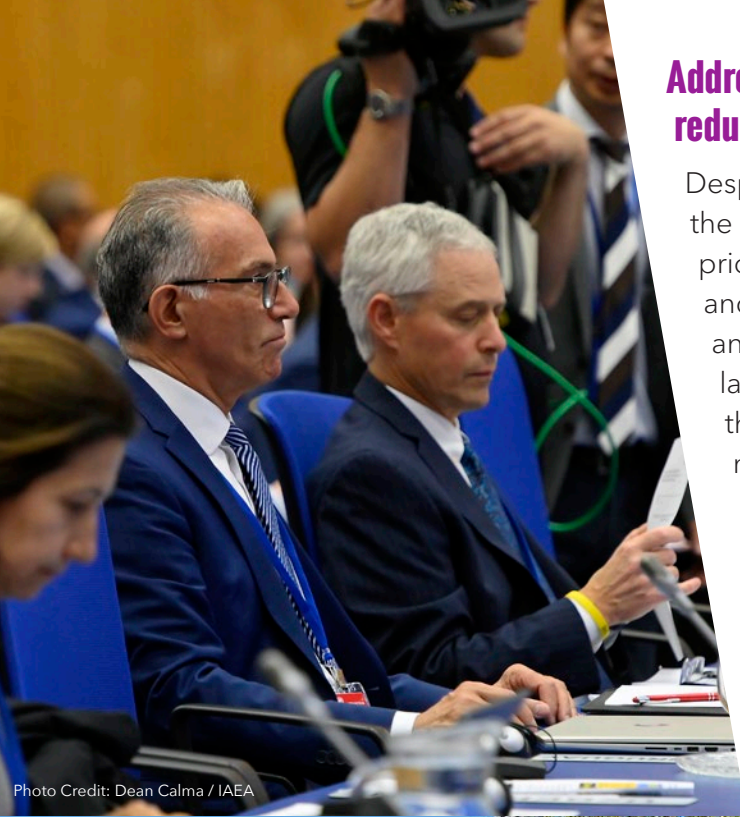


## Strengthening civil society in Mexico and Central America

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.







## Addressing the global nuclear threat and increasing engagement in the nuclear reduction movement

Despite nuclear weapons being one of the largest threats to life on Earth, and the expiration of the LAST international arms-control accord in 2026, the nuclear threat has lost prominence as a priority issue for U.S. voters and elected officials in recent decades. The Nuclear Threat Initiative and Ploughshares engaged with numerous nonprofits, think tanks, and coalitions in the peace and nuclear threat-reduction movement to identify barriers to engagement and found that the lack of a proactive, credible, and motivating narrative was one of the greatest needs across the movement. MG was engaged to conduct stakeholder research and develop and test a narrative and message framework that would increase awareness, prioritization, and a sense of agency around issues related to the nuclear threat. The resulting evidence and values-based narrative (“every step we take to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons makes us all safer”) is being widely disseminated and is already in use by leaders in the field who report increased engagement and activation.

Photo Credit: Dean Calma / IAEA



## Facilitating the launch of the Community Investment Recovery Center (CIRC) to build capacity of frontline communities to secure resources

The Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSCEJ) was selected as one of 18 regional technical assistance centers to build community-based organizational capacity to secure resources through the 2021 federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act via congressionally appropriated funding vehicles. DSCEJ was charged with providing capacity building for organizations across 13 states in federal regions 4 (the Southeast) and 6 (South Central). Building off previous work with DSCEJ to bolster capacity in response to other federal initiatives, MG teamed with DSCEJ to stand up a technical assistance network to support more than 50 frontline community-based organizations based on a six-stage road map of capacity building. MG also provided strategic communication to CBOs and storytelling to document and celebrate engaged organizations as they progressed in their organizational development, resource strategies, and policy impact.



# THANK YOU TO OUR 2024 CLIENTS



Smithsonian

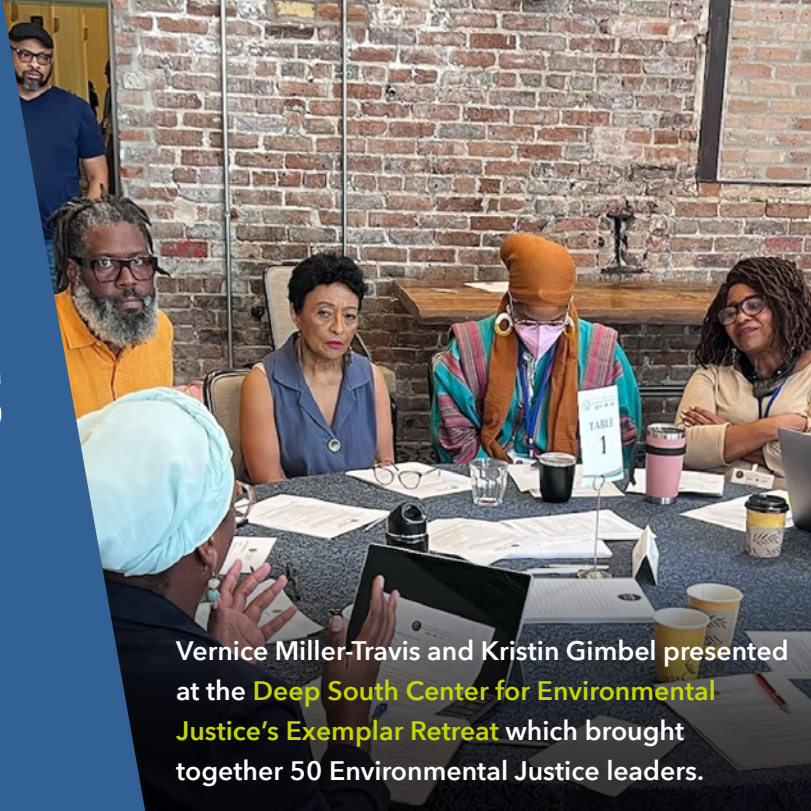




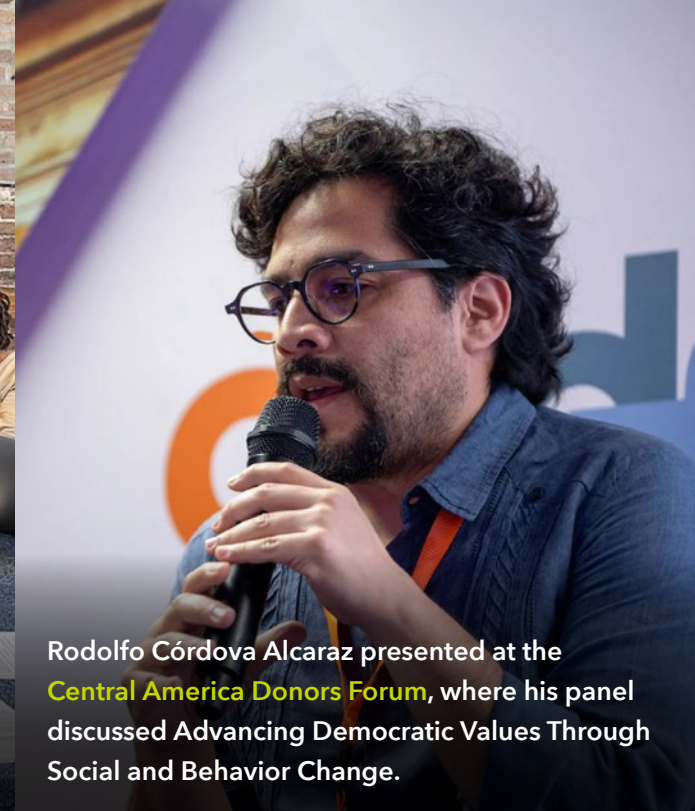
# EXCHANGING IDEAS

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 to learn more and visit our Ideas page to find articles, tools, and resources.



Vernice Miller-Travis and Kristin Gimbel presented at the **Deep South Center for Environmental Justice's Exemplar Retreat** which brought together 50 Environmental Justice leaders.



Rodolfo Córdova Alcaraz presented at the **Central America Donors Forum**, where his panel discussed Advancing Democratic Values Through Social and Behavior Change.

The Think BIG logo is displayed in the top left corner of the section. Below it is a decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping circles in various colors (orange, purple, teal, black) on a white background.

## Housing: Economic indicator or cornerstone of well-being?

By Jennifer Messenger and Max Friedenwald-Fishman, Metropolitan Group  
for the Think Big Community

Jennifer Messenger and Max Friedenwald-Fishman wrote this article for the Think Big Community:  
**"Housing: Economic indicator or  
cornerstone of well-being?"**

A woman wearing a white headscarf and sunglasses is raising her fist in a crowd. She is smiling and appears to be at a public gathering or protest. Other people in similar attire are visible in the background.

## PRO DEMOCRACY narrative playbook

Eric Friedenwald-Fishman and Haim Malka spoke at a gathering of Democracy and Civil Society Funders hosted by **PACE Funders** to explore critical support for democratic principles. They shared an activation strategy to advance effective pro-democracy narratives and norms.



# CONVENING TOGETHER

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



## What do we mean by energy justice?

This panel discussion at the National Environmental Justice Conference and Training Program explored how to unite community leaders and federal, state, and local regulators to get on the same page about our nation's approach to energy equity and justice.



## Elevating healthy housing solutions as a pathway to achieve equity and well-being.

Panelists explored solutions to address health equity related to housing insecurity, multiplied by structural racism and climate change.



## Gender, Race, and Democracy.

Our practitioners held a timely and important discussion about how identity-based narratives are used to weaken democracy.

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: **Artists Repertory Theatre, B Local PDX, Bird Alliance of Oregon, Central City Concern, Multnomah County, North Star Civic Foundation, New Seasons, Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Business for Climate, Oregon Solutions, Sightline Institute, The Street Trust, and Thread Creative.**

We are excited that the new **Collaboration Gym**, an initiative started by MG and North Star Civic Foundation, is launching this year.

This flexible event space is a forum for large groups to gather at TPWB and share ideas and opportunities for collaboration.







# 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 and to ensure our team brings the talent, experience, perspectives, and skills to best serve our clients and advance results for the broad constituencies they serve. 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 support ending houselessness, expanding behavioral health services, to advance rights-respecting technology policy, democratic values, anti-authoritarianism, civic space, LGBTQIA+ rights, 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 2024, our team dedicated time, expertise, and resources to a number of organizations and nonprofits including: **Artists Repertory Theatre, Basic Rights Oregon, Bird Alliance of Oregon, Business for a Better Portland, CapitalPlus Exchange, Central City Concern, Children's Environmental Health Network, Community Vision, the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, Maryland League of Conservation Voters, Native American Youth and Family Center, Oregon Business for Climate, Partners in Diversity, Resolve, Seeding Justice, WE ACT for Environmental Justice, Willamette University, and Yale Center on Climate Change and Health.**

## Awards and certifications

We were honored that our in-community work was recognized with a number of awards, including: 1) MG was awarded the 2024 Real Leaders Impact Award, which recognizes innovative global businesses committed to improving the well-being of our planet and society; 2) MG 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:

- **Build connections to counter hyperpolarization.**
- **Build currency for narratives that advance norms and public will for shared prosperity, human and environmental health, and widespread support for systems that center freedom, fairness, and fearlessness.**
- **Strengthen the advocacy, communication, and engagement capacity of organizations and movements to more effectively advance and protect sound policies, practices, and systems.**
- **Celebrate human creativity and expression to solve collective problems, drive imagination and innovation, connect communities, 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*  
[metgroup.com](http://metgroup.com) [metgroupmexico.com](http://metgroupmexico.com)



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follow: @metgroup



# 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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