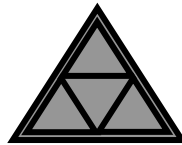
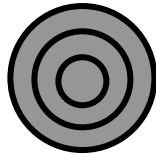


# Movement as Network

## Connecting People and Organizations in the Environmental Movement



*Gideon Rosenblatt  
Executive Director, ONE/Northwest  
January 2004*

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*This document and related discussions are available at [www.movementasnetwork.org](http://www.movementasnetwork.org)*

# Summary

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The environmental movement is at a critical juncture in its history. It has brought about numerous and important achievements over the last four decades. But recent setbacks in the United States show that its hard-fought accomplishments are still all too vulnerable to changes in political winds caused by pressures from special interests. The viability of life on this planet is too important to allow the short-term interests of such a small majority to interfere with society's urgent need for a more sustainable path.

Immunizing society from such harmful influences means integrating a new set of values into its very fabric at a scale not seen in this country since the shifts that accompanied universal suffrage and the broadening of civil rights. It means harnessing these beliefs to build a broad-based social and political force capable of applying both political and economic pressure to shifting society into more sustainable patterns. This is the task facing the environmental movement at the outset of the new century.

The environmental movement requires new organizational structures and strategies to succeed in this next phase of its evolution. This paper presents a model called "Movement as Network." This model may have relevance to other social movements and networks, but the focus of this paper is using it to think about new ways of restructuring the environmental movement so it can be more powerful and more effective. The core ideas of this model are:

**Movement as Network:** The environmental movement is not just some vague concept, but an actual entity; a network, made up of very real interconnections between people and organizations that is greater than the sum of its individual parts. This network is difficult to visualize, but it is real nonetheless, and the health of this network is a critical factor in determining the vitality and power of the environmental movement.

**Restructuring Organizational Ties:** Organizations play a critical role in organizing resources around specific missions within the broader environmental movement. Today these organizations are badly fragmented. They have diverse missions but tend to operate with similar funding and organizational development models that lead to competitive friction. At the same time, they lack the inter-organizational connections needed to better integrate their work. By specializing, restructuring and improving connections between organizations, the movement has an opportunity to transform itself into a dynamic network with far greater resilience, responsiveness and power.

**Segmenting Connections with People:** People relate to environmental causes in different ways. The movement has done a good job of connecting with one-sixth of the public via "high engagement" membership and activism strategies. It must now also build a "low engagement" strategy to connect with the remaining 80% of the public who share environmental values. New organizational strategies are required to reach and serve these new audiences.

# Background

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Ron Arnold, one of the founders of the “Wise Use” movement and a leading opponent of the environmental movement, once used the phrase “segmentary and polycephalus<sup>1</sup>” to describe the proliferation of small, autonomous organizations focusing on various aspects of environmental protection.<sup>2</sup> The **fragmentary nature of this social movement** and the multifaceted lens of issues through which the public sees it have resulted in the perception that the environmental movement is inconsistent, divided and out of touch with the concerns of ordinary Americans – even as survey after survey shows that most people agree with its basic values.<sup>3</sup>

In the harsh light of today’s political and funding climate, many environmental leaders are questioning whether the environmental movement has the right **strategies and organizational structures** in place to bring about the kinds of lasting change required to ensure that our planet remains healthy and vital for many generations to come. Opinions tend to fall into one of two categories:

- The first sees the movement’s chief failings as fragmenting its power across many small organizations and confusing the public with a cacophony of voices. In this view, the right strategy for success in the current austere financial times is to **concentrate investments on proven leaders** and let smaller, marginal organizations consolidate or wither away.
- The second approach has roots in the grassroots organizing theories of Saul Alinsky, and shuns bulky organizational structures and long-term strategic planning in favor of more **fluid, loose-knit networks of people** working together on high impact campaigns.<sup>4</sup>

This paper is about a third path -- “Movement as Network” -- with the potential to unify these seemingly contradictory approaches. Movement as Network shifts the focus away from individual people and organizations working on environmental issues and toward the connections that link them together. At the heart of this third path is a belief that the environmental movement is not just some vague concept, but that it is an actual entity; a **network, made up of very real interconnections between people and organizations that is more than just the sum of its parts.**

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<sup>1</sup> “Many-headed”.

<sup>2</sup> There are over 1,300 organizations listed in ONE/Northwest’s Northwest Conservation Directory (which includes Alaska, British Columbia, Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon) and recent IRS Form 990 tax data suggests these numbers may be closer to between 2,000 and 2,500.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that the “Wise Use” movement has made an explicit strategy of alienating the public from the environmental movement by helping to foment an environmental backlash in the 1990s. In a 1991 Arnold told the New York Times, “We created a sector of public opinion that didn’t used to exist. No one was aware that environmentalism was a problem until we came along.”

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting high-tech version of this approach see Martin Kearns’ 2003 whitepaper, “Network Centric Advocacy: Applying the Principles of Network Centric Action for Environmental and Progressive Advocacy”.

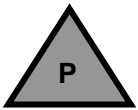
# The Movement as Network Model

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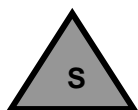
What follows are the outlines of a new model for thinking about the environmental movement called **Movement as Network**. While elements of this model may look familiar, *Movement as Network is not intended as a description of the environmental movement as it actually exists today*. It is merely a model to simplify today's organizational structures and relationships as a means of identifying new ways of restructuring the movement in order to transform its "segmented, polycephalous" nature into new sources of flexibility, diversity and power.

## **Organizations in the Network**

Organizations have unique missions that lead them to play different roles in the network.<sup>5</sup> These roles fall into three broad categories, each with its own set of optimal strategies and organizational structures. It is common for environmental groups to mix these sets of strategies today. But one of the primary tenets of this paper is that the **movement as a whole becomes far stronger when organizations specialize** in one of the following three strategies.<sup>6</sup>



**People Organizations** define themselves by serving distinct audiences. Some focus on specific demographic segments, while others focus on geographically-defined communities. These organizations come in two varieties: small grassroots organizers and large environmental brands. Their role in the network is to reach out to various segments of society and help them build appropriate connections with environmental causes. The keys to success for these organizations are carefully defining audiences and listening closely to their needs. Because these groups define themselves by constituents whose interests are rarely one dimensional, they tend to span issue areas and occasionally expand beyond a strict focus on the environmental.

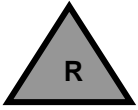


**Solution Organizations** define themselves not only by the issue they focus on, but also by their particular approach to solving it. Some may solve problems with hands-on field research; some by playing watchdog to a particular government agency. The range of issues and solutions is incredibly varied which goes a long way toward explaining the incredible diversity of the environmental movement. Collectively, these organizations define the mission of the network by identifying the problems that need attention and by developing the broad range of approaches to solving them. Solution Organizations house the movement's issue-related technical and policy expertise. They also play a critical role in ensuring that ecologically important issues receive focus even if they lack the kind of mass appeal to draw large constituent bases.

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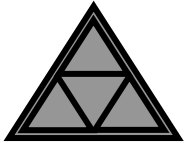
<sup>5</sup> For an interesting look at the role different actors play at different stages in the lifecycle of a social movement, see: "Doing Democracy" by Bill Moyer, with JoAnn McAllister, Mary Lou Finley and Steven Soifer. New Society Publishing (August 2001). ISBN: 0865714185.

<sup>6</sup> For a similar model applied to commercial firms see: *Net Worth: Shaping Markets When Customers Make the Rules*. By John Hagel III and Marc Singer. Harvard Business School Press; (March 1999). ISBN: 0875848893.



**Resource Organizations** define themselves by the particular expertise or resources that they bring to the rest of the network. These organizations specialize in developing unique resources and expertise and in deploying these resources throughout the network to raise its collective effectiveness. Examples of expertise include fundraising, technology, campaign strategy, legal strategy or marketing and communications. Examples of resources include providing financial support and particular types of infrastructure such as meeting places or communications infrastructure.

## ***“Re-organizing” the Network***



Distinguishing these three different organizational roles opens new possibilities for rethinking relationships between environmental organizations and suggests ways the movement might be restructured into a more powerful and integrated whole. This fusion is captured symbolically with the three linked triangles in the icon to the left.

### **Organizational “un-bundling” and specialization**

The 1990s were a time of economic upheaval as US financial markets pressured industry after industry to restructure itself to become more efficient. The huge decline in charitable funding from the boom years of the late 90s is now putting similar pressure on environmental groups.

**Specialization is one of evolution’s key tricks for eking out efficiencies.** Profitability is the private sector’s natural selector. Over the last decade corporations have invested heavily in outsourcing as a means of allowing them to specialize in what they do best and increasing their profitability. Because they are not driven by profits, mission-driven organizations lack the market signals encouraging them to specialize in what they do best. As funding has dried up in recent years, the closest thing to this type of pressure comes from foundations and other supporters trying to avoid redundancies and program overlaps between their grantees.

The current funding crisis is now exposing the degree to which the environmental movement has over-invested in institutional overhead at the local levels in recent years. It is replicating board development, fundraising and many other functions across thousands of very small organizations. One of the important conclusions of this paper is that organizations **need to find ways to un-bundle these duplicate activities and specialize in what they do best.** For People Organizations this means focusing 100% on listening to and serving specific audiences. For Solution Organizations this means focusing entirely on identifying the most pressing ecological problems, developing effective solutions and distributing those solutions throughout the network. For Resource Organizations it means developing a resource or area of expertise with broad applicability to large numbers of organizations and distributing those resources efficiently throughout the network.

### **Why the jack-of-all-trades is a master of none**

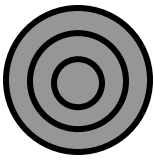
Most environmental nonprofits currently attempt to mix elements of all three strategies. They do this in part because they have been taught to do this through a model of

organizational development widely practiced throughout the nonprofit sector. This model emphasizes a standard approach to diversifying funding through growing large memberships, hiring development staff, investing in board development, etc. The uniformity of this model nudges all organizations towards a common organizational development model, which increases competition between groups, burdens them with extra administrative overhead, and distracts them from focusing on what they do best.

While a few organizations do successfully manage multiple strategies, they do so at the peril of ignoring “**opportunity costs**” – the value forgone by investing resources across multiple strategies rather than concentrating them in one area where they most excel. Organizations best suited to People strategies, for example, may be tempted to build their own “in-house” solutions to specific ecological problems. But doing so usually increases the pressure to push these in-house solutions on constituents, regardless of whether they naturally map to their interests. The opportunity cost in this example is that the resources poured into this particular in-house solution could easily have been used to improve the organization’s ability to listen to and serve its constituents, or perhaps to grow the organization’s ability to reach more people. Another example is an organization with an excellent solution to a very specific ecological problem that squanders its resources by trying to build a large constituent base out of a niche issue. The opportunity cost here is failing to invest more in perfecting its unique solutions to their issue.

Specialization and a focus on core competencies open the door to new strategies and new types of relationships between organizations. Complexity theory suggests that for the environmental movement to evolve to its next stage this kind of specialization of institutions is half the problem. The other half is weaving these very different individual nodes together into an integrated, harmonious whole. This will be the focus of the *Implications of the Model* section of this paper below.

## Reframing People's Connections to the Network



Ask Americans whether they agree with the broad goals of the environmental movement and four out of five say yes. Ask whether they are actively involved and the number drops to one in six.<sup>7</sup> This disjuncture between people's stated values and actions has been an ongoing source of frustration for environmental activists. The Movement as Network model approaches this problem by seeing the "public" less as a monolithic entity and more as a mosaic of many intersecting segments of people. **Segmentation** is a powerful tool, especially when it takes into account people's values, beliefs and lifestyle preferences. The Movement as Network model segments people into three nested circles based on their level of interest and engagement in environmental issues.

1. The largest, outer circle represents the 80% of Americans who are **sympathetic citizens** -- people who view the environment as a low salience issue; important, but not urgent in their day-to-day lives.
2. The next circle represents the one out of six **connected citizens** who have some direct connection to a part of the environmental movement.
3. Inside that circle is the **active core** made up of active volunteers (activists) and the professional staff of environmental groups.

The history of the environmental movement over the **last quarter century** is the story of **engaging the two innermost circles** and there is still incredibly important work that remains to be done at this level. Even in the rosier scenario, the sympathetic citizens in the outermost circle will only participate in lightweight engagement in environmental causes. For more involved civic actions requiring greater expenditures of personal time and energy, the movement will stop dead in its tracks if it ignores its active core.

The story of the environmental movement over the **next quarter century** is about **building relationships with the outermost circle of sympathetic citizens**. It is about engaging the "environmental majority" and building the deep societal commitment to sustainability that will protect our world for generations to come.

The organizing and membership strategies that worked well for building relationships with the inner circles need to be completely retooled for this larger segment of society. Members of this broad segment do not define themselves as "environmentalists" so finding them may require working through churches, parent groups and other institutions with which they have trusted relationships. Connecting with this segment means refraining from inundating them with endless streams of issue-specific action alerts and press releases. It means listening to people and helping them to interpret and synthesize these issues in ways that resonate with their core values, beliefs and lifestyle choices.

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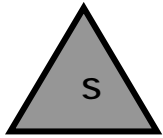
<sup>7</sup> April 2000 Gallup poll. 83% agreed with 'broadest goals of the environmental movement' while 16% were 'active participants'. "The Grassroots of a Green Revolution: Polling America on the Environment" by Deborah Lynn Guber. Page 3. MIT Press; (January 2003). ISBN: 0262571609.

# Implications of the Model

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Having outlined the Movement as Network's basic framework of the three organizational types and the three segments of the public, the focus now shifts to some of the implications of the model for Solution, People and Resource organizations.

## Solution Organizations



Solution Organizations collectively define the purpose of the network in that they identify the environmental problems that need attention and the specific means of solving them. In many ways, Solution Organization strategy is the easiest to misunderstand because it maps so closely to how the majority of environmental groups organize themselves today.

Solution Organizations are **extremely diverse** due to the variety of approaches that can be adopted to solve a particular problem in a particular place. A group that protects orca whales off the Puget Sound, for instance, might specialize in field research, in playing watch dog to whale watching tours or in developing marine regulatory policies. A Solution Organization might spring up to adopt any one of these strategies or some combination thereof – and others might crop up just like it in separate locations.

While they differ on issues and approaches, Solution groups do share a number of things in common.

When they do their jobs right, Solution groups all carry out the following activities:

1. **Problem articulation:** Developing a solid understanding of the problem they are trying to solve through research, then clearly defining and articulating the problem.
2. **Solution development:** Identifying, testing and developing specific approaches to solving the problem. In many cases, the output at this stage is a specific set of policies they want to see adopted.
3. **Strategy development:** Developing the power map identifying decision makers, influencers, allies and opposition. Determining how to reach and persuade the first two, work with the third on areas that are not core competencies, and neutralize the fourth. In many cases, this amounts to the packaging of policies in ways that aid their adoption.
4. **Solution implementation:** Executing the strategy. Assessing impact and refining as necessary.

The Movement as Network model has the most to say about step three because strategy development is the step that is most focused on identifying how a particular solution relates to other people and organizations in the network.

**Example:** Climate Solutions comes very close to a pure Solution Organization by focusing on making the Pacific Northwest a world leader in solutions to global warming. It is building world-class domain expertise, has innovative programs to carry out its solutions and distributes them via collaborations with a broad range of constituent organizations.  
[www.climatesolutions.org](http://www.climatesolutions.org)



## **Scale affects how to reach decision makers and influencers**

The number of decision makers and influencers involved in bringing about a particular solution determines the **scale at which that solution needs to operate**. Lowering carbon dioxide emissions by appealing directly to tens of thousands of drivers to persuade them to drive less, for example, is a large-scale problem because it involves independent decisions from many individuals. In contrast, tightening state regulations around stream flow policies could be a smaller scale solution if officials are capable of being directly influenced by a handful of concerned and motivated activists. The number of decision makers and influencers involved in solving a problem determines its scale. Scale determines the types of strategies that need to be employed in order to bring the solution to fruition.

The tight issue focus of Solution Organizations **narrows their appeal to niche audiences of people with passion for their issue**. Some issues appeal to broader audiences than others, but rarely do Solution groups at the local, state or regional level build active constituent bases larger than five thousand people. What these constituent bases lack in size, however, they can make up for in passion. Well run Solution Organizations can have very strong followings of loyal financial supporters and volunteers and extremely involved activists. **Solution Organizations thus are most effective when they work on problems that are smaller in scale** and where they operate at the two inner circles of the public: the active core and the connected citizen. Solutions that involve small numbers of decision makers and influencers are the perfect scale for these types of organizations.

Solution groups are **analogous to product companies**. Product companies focus their resources on developing great products. They can reach niche audiences effectively on their own, but in order to scale out to much larger audiences, they need to rely on intermediaries. For example, Levis designs clothing that meets the needs of particular audiences but distributes through retailers to get them into the hands of large numbers of people. The company could invest in building its own retail outlets, but doing so takes away from its focus on making great products and competing at the retail level may dissuade larger retailers from carrying its line. The Movement as Network model suggests a similar relationship between environmental groups, where **People Organizations become the channel through which Solution Organizations reach large segments of the public** for large scale solutions. Because a large part of what Solution Organizations do is develop policy around specific issues, this model suggest they focus on developing and packaging “policy products” that can be easily marketed and distributed by People Organizations.

## **Identifying and Working with Allies**

Environmental protection work is subject to constant change. Strategies that fail to respond quickly and flexibly to the changing ecological, economic, political and social forces lose effectiveness. The most effective Solution groups mitigate these kinds of risks by developing a range of solutions to the problems they work on.

Outsourcing is a powerful way to increase an organization’s breadth of expertise and range of solutions without diminishing its responsiveness to change. Rather than permanently maintain a top-tier campaign strategist on staff, for example, a Solution group might contract this work to a specialized organization or consultant when it is really needed for a

particular campaign. There will always be solutions that are so specialized or strategic they need to be staffed in-house, but many, many types of activities, such as fundraising, organizational development, and technology planning and implementation, have broad applicability for large numbers of organizations and are excellent candidates for outsourcing. **Outsourcing is, in fact, the primary connection between Resource and Solution groups.** Outsourcing frees organizations to concentrate resources on those activities where they truly add the most unique value – their core competencies. In this sense, Solution groups become the network’s “**solution catalysts**” by fluidly marshaling the expertise, resources, people and organizations best suited to solving a particular problem.

When this kind of coordination of resources and expertise happens between Solution Organizations it forms a “**Solution Network.**” Because Solution groups work with the most engaged segments of the public (the active core and connected citizens), **improving collaboration within clusters of Solutions organizations is one of the most important things the environmental movement can do to more effectively engage its current constituent base.**

Within the Movement as Network model, there are two distinct types of Solution Networks: **solution sharing networks**, and **solution coordinating networks**.

**In a solution sharing network, organizations share knowledge and resources around a particular solution or approach to environmental problems.** In many cases, the organizations participating in solution sharing networks are geographically distributed and collaborate relatively easily because there are obvious benefits from having a dedicated local presence in a particular place.

Examples include habitat restoration work, watchdog roles, land acquisition, and field research. If these local points of presence remain isolated from each other, investments are duplicated and it is difficult to build the critical mass of expertise needed to develop the solution to its fullest potential. In some cases, the network is hub-like with the bulk of the expertise and innovation occurring in one centralized location. In others, the network is more peer-like with expertise shared in a more distributed fashion across organizations.

**Example:** The Land Trust Alliance is an example of a fairly centralized solution sharing network, by disseminating best practices in land conservation solutions with a network of over 1,200 land trusts operating at local and regional levels. [www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org)

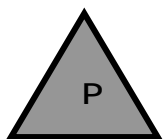
**In a solution coordinating network, organizations with different solutions collaborate and target their different approaches at a common problem.** Forest groups, for example, might connect their legal strategies with public outreach and land acquisition work in a coordinated push for protection for a particular area. These types of solution networks typically take the form of short term collaborations and account for the bulk of multi-organization campaigns in the environmental movement today. Solution coordinating networks are very important because they can bring together fairly passionate constituent bases from the two inner circles of engagement. Solution coordinating networks are

tremendously powerful for bringing about deep forms of engagement on small-to-medium scale solutions.

Solution coordinating networks can be extremely difficult to maintain because of **competitive friction between groups, arising from a scarcity of resources**, with money being one of the biggest sources of division. Organizations participating in solution coordinating networks can have a lot of overlap in their pools of prospective financial supporters. This is because these supporters are more likely to connect with these organizations through an affinity with an issue than through the particular programmatic approach the group takes. For this reason, groups in solution coordinating networks are extremely protective of their relationships with supporters. There are technology solutions that enable coordinated communications across organizational constituent bases without sharing actual names between groups. These solutions will go some distance to enhancing collaboration amongst these networks, but **deeper collaboration requires that the movement focus its attention on reducing the financial sources of competitive friction** between members of solution coordinating networks.

The focus on narrowly defined issues that most Solution groups have limits their appeal to niche audiences. When Solution groups face problems requiring participation from larger segments of the public, many are tempted to try to build these connections themselves. This path leads to failure because their niche issue lacks the kind of broad appeal capable of attracting large audiences. Another approach is for Solution Organizations that face large-scale problems to **partner with People Organizations** to in effect “distribute” their solutions to a larger constituent bases. The networks that form between these types of relationships are **solution distribution networks**. As Solution groups run into problems that require reaching out to the larger ring of the sympathetic public, these distribution networks should not be limited to nonprofit environmental organizations. Other kinds of nonprofits in the health, social justice and other sectors may make excellent distribution vehicles for certain types of solutions. Similar distribution partnerships might also be found with for-profit publishers, broadcasters and retailers.

## ***People Organizations***



People Organizations define themselves by their audience. Where Solution Organizations start with issues and use power maps to identify the decision makers and influencers they need to engage to solve that issue, People Organizations start with clearly defined audiences, work to build their power and then apply that power to a variety of issues. **People Organization**

**strategies come in two flavors: big brands and grassroots organizers.** While different in many respects, both share a laser-like focus on understanding and serving their constituents in ways that go beyond mere positioning to the very core of their what they do and how they do it.

### **People-centric Grassroots Organizers**

These are the grassroots organizations of the environmental movement. They coalesce around relatively small, well-defined communities of people who band together in order to increase their collective power. These grassroots organizations tend to eschew marketing

techniques as a means of connecting with constituent bases in favor of more direct forms of **face-to-face outreach and other traditional organizing tactics**. These organizations are critically important for a number of reasons, not least because they are the environmental movement's primary means of connecting to the people who live in many of the remote areas it seeks to protect and to communities impacted by environmental health issues.

Some of these communities are bound by values while others are bound by a shared interest in a specific issue, such as removing a toxic waste site. **Values-based grassroots organizations** tend to be longer lived and more institutional in nature because their members share broad concerns that keep them engaged over time and provide them with a sense of belonging and community that justifies formalizing these institutions and staffing them with full-time professionals.

In contrast, **issue-specific grassroots organizations** tend to be more ephemeral in nature, gaining and losing their draw as problems rise and fall in urgency. This kind of grassroots activity tends to lend itself to volunteer-driven, looser-knit organizational structures. Much of the movement's over-investment in institutional overhead at the local level is a result of erecting permanent institutions around this kind of grassroots activity rather than keeping it informal and volunteer driven or rolling into the more permanent values based community organizations.

**Example:** Northern Plains Resource Council helps Montana citizens organize on a broad span of issues affecting the farming and ranching communities of Montana. To quote from its website: "Make no mistake about it; Northern Plains Resource Council is its members. Northern Plains is built around them, and depends on them."  
[www.northernplains.org](http://www.northernplains.org)

## People-centric Environmental Brands

Branding is receiving growing attention in the environmental community today. While many groups stand to benefit from branding techniques, **building large-scale brands to reach out to broad segments of the public is expensive and difficult**. The environmental movement needs to be very careful about these investments.

Today, broadly recognized environmental brands are **almost exclusively the domain of large national and international groups** like World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and Sierra Club. These groups spend heavily on mass marketing, membership promotion, and donor cultivation and have broken through the noise to build brands that are recognizable by broad segments of the public. This approach has worked reasonably well at a national scale where expensive marketing programs and brand building can be amortized over large audiences. Strong environmental brands are noticeably missing at the local level, making it difficult to mobilize large constituent bases on the local issues that most affect the places people live.

Assuming for a moment that strong local environmental brands are possible, how big could one get? Even ignoring the larger 85% of sympathetic citizens and just concentrating on the connected citizens segment, a strong People-centric environmental brand in a metropolitan area like Seattle should in theory be able to focus the political clout of some 400,000 people (16% of Seattle's population of 2.5 million). Contrast this with the largest

environmental groups in the city, whose membership tops out at less than 8,000 people. The potential political clout of Seattle's connected citizens is split into hundreds of tiny constituent bases, isolated from each other by organizational boundaries.<sup>8</sup> **Unifying these local bases into active, integrated political forces is one of the most important challenges facing the environmental movement today** and People Organizations represent its best chance for doing this.

### **People Organizations as Environmental Intermediaries:**

Intermediary organizations place clearly defined audiences at the center of everything they do. **They focus on building relationships with these audiences, listening to their needs and translating those needs into services.** Intermediaries play a special role in connecting audiences with a range of suppliers who can meet their needs. Rather than build these goods and services themselves, they specialize in listening to what customers need and solving their needs through a variety of sources. We run into examples of local intermediaries in a variety of contexts every day: realtors (Windermere in Seattle), bookstores (Powell's Books in Portland), travel agents (Doug Fox Travel in Seattle), radio stations (KING FM in Seattle) and newspapers (The Oregonian in Portland).

The environmental movement is nearly devoid of this kind of intermediary which help citizens make sense of its bewildering cacophony of voices. Environmental reporters in mainstream media outlets fill part of this void, but their lack of focus and the constraints of profitability make them fall far short of what is possible and needed.

A local People Organization might fulfill this role as environmental intermediary by **starting off as a publisher, or "infomediary"** – an organization focused on *interpreting* the most interesting, most relevant news from the broad range of environmental issues affecting a specific community. As an intermediary, this environmental publisher would concentrate on listening to the needs and interests of its audience and make heavy use of outside sources such as local Solution groups for their stories.

**Example:** Grist Magazine is an online news and editorial service aimed squarely at the budding next generation of 18-34 year old environmentalists. Its tagline "doom and gloom with a sense of humor" highlights its unique and keenly insightful approach to serving this audience.

[www.gristmagazine.org](http://www.gristmagazine.org)

If this People Organization does a good job of listening to its audience's needs, it will likely find that **being of service to them does not stop with aggregating and interpreting environmental news.** If it truly understands the values and lifestyles of its audience, it will uncover all kinds of unmet service needs that fall within its environmental mission. Examples include organizing outdoor recreation activities (hiking, biking, and kayaking outings), providing avenues for people to exercise civic responsibilities (voters guides, online advocacy campaigns), offering new types of consumer services (information on healthy eating choices and energy conservation, connections and discounts with green

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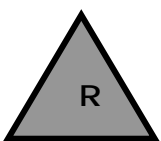
<sup>8</sup> A ONE/Northwest survey of 123 conservation groups across Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Montana and Idaho in September 2002 found that the average (mean) constituent base of these organizations was around 2,400 while the median was only 1,000.

businesses), and providing education opportunities (nature walks, lectures). **The People group does not have to build and operate these services itself.** Just as they source subject matter expertise from local Solution groups for news stories, they can also **outsource specific service opportunities** like organizing nature walks and other education opportunities, running targeted campaigns, or managing volunteer beach cleanups. This is the concept of the **solution distributing network**, and through it, People Organizations play the role of intermediary, or broker, in connecting local audiences with Solution partners in order to offer the broad range of services needed to **appeal to larger segments of sympathetic citizens.**

This type of collaboration between People Organizations and Solution Organizations **improves the environmental movement's ability to respond flexibly and powerfully to change.** Over the last decade, environmental organizations have become steeped in the importance of strategic planning. Many of the movement's leading organizations are as effective as they are because they have invested in long-term strategic plans to guide their activities over three-to-five year planning horizons. Strategic planning is particularly important to Solution Organizations because of the time needed to develop their knowledge and expertise and because progress on many environmental issues requires time and steady focus. While the increased use of long-term strategic planning has been positive for the environmental movement, it has also reduced its flexibility and responsiveness to change. People Organizations offer an interesting solution to this dilemma. These organizations succeed by understanding the shifting interests of their audiences and what issues are most likely to capture the excitement and energy at any given point in time. They move from issue to issue, highlighting one solution or another at various time in the form of campaigns timed by audience interest, politics, and other opportunistic factors. By distributing the solutions of Solution Organizations in solution distributing networks this way, People Organizations enables the network to focus resources on building expertise around specific issues solutions while remaining and flexible to responsive to change and opportunity.

One of the most difficult aspects of running a large People-centric environmental brand stems from defining its mission. For these organizations, it will be very easy to confuse the means of being of service to their audience with the ends of protecting the environment. Serving larger, more mainstream audiences frequently makes organizations more conservative in outlook and approach. For the purposes of the Movement as Network model, however, **these organizations are first and foremost social change institutions.** Whether they bring about this change by aggregating political power like MoveOn or focus on broader types of personal behavioral change, the services they provide to their audiences are always clearly understood a means to these social change ends.

## **Resource Organizations**



Resource Organizations develop and distribute resources and specialized expertise needed by the rest of the movement. These organizations are some of the easiest to identify today because they map directly to the movement's capacity builders, consultants and foundations. Though small in number, these organizations play a critical role in ensuring a healthy and effective movement.



One of the key conclusions of the Movement as Network model is that organizations need to concentrate on what they do best and outsource the rest. This concept is particularly important to Resource Organizations, for they are most often the providers of this outsourcing activity, in the form of technology support, media consulting, fundraising assistance, as well as marketing and campaign advice. This expertise takes time and money to develop. There is a subset of Resource Organizations known collectively as “capacity builders” that specialize transferring their particular area of expertise to other organizations. The Movement as Network model suggests that duplicating these investments across thousands of small organizations is a bad use of network resources and runs counter to the outsourcing model that has been used so effectively by the private sector. Capacity builders need to reassess the universal applicability of the “teach them to fish” emphasis on training and in-house capacity building. There are times when organizations just need to buy the fish. Capacity builders need to help organizations focus on what they do best so they can outsource the rest.

**Example:** ONE/Northwest’s Scheduled Support service sends consultants to environmental offices on a regular basis for routine technology maintenance. In the past, organizations might have been trained to undertake these tasks themselves, but an outsourcing mentality suggest there are more important, more effective uses of their time and energy. [www.onenw.org](http://www.onenw.org)

### **Diversifying funding models**

The Movement as Network model suggests some new strategies for funders in investing their financial resources into the movement over time. An important part of funding social change organizations is assessing the core competencies of prospective grantees and determining whether their organizational strategies and structures are capable of fulfilling their mission. In a world of finite financial resources, it is also entails determining whether the organization has a sustainable financial model.

What is financially sustainable for one type of organization may not be for others. Resource Organizations have the potential to earn significant portions of their income from the services they provide to the network. People Organizations invest heavily in outreach activities that build the kinds of large constituent bases capable of supporting sustainable individual donor programs. They may also earn income from services provided to members. Solution groups for the most part lack fee-for-service income, and in many cases focus on issues that are too narrow to draw anything but a niche major donor base. For this reason, **Solution Organizations are likely to remain dependent upon long-term foundation support.** From the perspective of the Movement as Network model, this may not be a bad outcome.

Over the last decade, Solution Organizations have been taught to follow a standard organizational development playbook, encouraging them to diversify their funding base away from heavy foundation dependency by building individual donor bases. Doing so adds considerable administrative overhead to these small organizations as they add development staff and communication processes for finding and maintaining relationships with large constituent bases. In many cases, **the pressure to build large membership**

**bases out of issues that are not naturally conducive to garnering broad public interest and support has led organizations dangerously off mission.** Foundations need to help remove this pressure and allow these organizations to “rightsize” themselves, by stripping out this administrative overhead and concentrating on what they do best and what is most needed by the rest of the network.

For foundations, such a strategy marks a significant change from currently perceived best practices. Foundations understandably like to diversify risk in grantee portfolios and encouraging their financial diversification is one means of doing this. There is also probably not enough foundation funding available to carry the full financial burden of supporting the wide range of Solution groups in the field today. While stripping administrative overhead from these organizations will enable them to do more with less, many hard decisions will need to be made in choosing between organizations based on the importance of their mission, their strategies, organizational structure and how they fit with other organizations in the network.

It is also important to note that this type of strategy shift can not be adopted overnight. Resource Organizations need time to help transition their budgets increasingly to fee-for-service models and People Organizations will need time to build up the large constituent bases, development processes and services to meet their financial needs. There will always be exceptions too, but the Movement as Network model suggests that the critical role played by Solution Organizations within the network is the one that is most needy of support from the foundation community.

The Movement as Network model also suggests that funders need to invest far more resources in facilitating connections between organizations in the network that is the environmental movement. While many foundations have strived to increase collaboration between their grantees over the years, far too little work has been done to facilitate new and better relationships between the individual people who work in these organizations. Fostering these stronger social ties is important work that requires new investments in communications capacity, information sharing and opportunities to mix together in person.



# Closing Thoughts

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The Movement as Network framework represents a new way of thinking about large social movements. It starts with the premise that these movements are not just collections of individuals and organizations. It suggests that something more than the sum of individual parts emerges out of the interconnections between people and organizations. The vast web of relationships connecting these entities forms a network, and when viewed with a network perspective, interesting patterns emerge.

The Movement as Network model suggests that the key to strengthening the environmental movement is **building more and stronger connections between its participants**. Stronger ties between organizations come through focusing on core competencies and unique roles as a means of removing competitive barriers and building lasting patterns of collaboration between organizations. Building more and stronger ties to people is the heart of any social movement. It comes from understanding the differing needs of various segments of society and building services that attract and commit them to the course of sustainability.

The kinds of shifts in organizational behavior this paper proposes will not be easy. Entrenched ways of thinking and the sheer scale of the changes will lead many to conclude it is unrealistic and cannot be done. And yet, deep down inside we know that something is not right. We see that despite all its advances over the past quarter century, environmental protection is still dangerously dependent on short-term shifts in the political and economic climate. True and lasting environmental protection depends upon building a society that thrives in harmony with the natural world and this level of impact requires integrating environmental concerns into the fabric of society at a much, much deeper level than exists today. Working harder doesn't get us there by itself. We need new models and new approaches.

The Movement as Network model was inspired by recent developments in network theory and complexity theory. This paper is an initial attempt to tease out some of the lessons from these new sciences and apply them to a network of interrelated environmental missions. It and the [www.MovementAsNetwork.org](http://www.MovementAsNetwork.org) website are intended as a conversation starter; a catalyst for additional thinking and work by others in the field.

Complexity theory teaches us that extraordinarily complex and wonderful accomplishments can emerge through the connected-yet-independent actions of individual parts, just as a beautiful symphony emerges from the synchronous playing of violins, flutes, horns, and percussion. Network theory teaches us that weaving tighter connections between the organizations and people in a network raises the effectiveness of each individual node while raising the collective effectiveness and value of the entire network. In this sense, the Movement as Network model should inspire us, for it reminds all of us working on individual aspects of environmental protection that we belong to something greater and far more powerful than we could ever amount to by ourselves.

## Continuing the discussion...

The Movement as Network model raises a number of questions worthy of deeper analysis than is feasible in this paper. The [www.MovementAsNetwork.org](http://www.MovementAsNetwork.org) website will hopefully serve as a catalyst for further exploration of many of the issues raised by the model. This site will not only include additional background and references to additional sources of information, but will be a place for others to contribute their ideas to the dialog. Some of the issues to be explored on the site include:

- **Strategy within the network:** Is it true that organizations should pick only one organizational strategy, or can an organization succeed by combining a Solution Organization strategy with a People Organization strategy?
- **Funding the network:** The model suggests that not all environmental organizations are well suited to individual donor programs and that foundations are likely to be their primary source of funding. What are the implications of this and is it really feasible in today's tight funding climate?
- **Marketing the network:** Building strong brands of any type is difficult at the local and regional level. Is a powerful local environmental brand really feasible? What strategies and approaches are most likely to succeed? How many of these kinds of brands are feasible within a particular city or state? More generally, what are the best ways to reach new audiences?
- **Organizing in the network:** How well do power maps work in determining organizing strategies?
- **Serving the network:** Knowing when to outsource expertise or build it in-house is not a science. Under what circumstances is a particular expertise best kept in house? When is "capacity building" appropriate and when is it best to simply outsource a particular need?
- **Connecting the network:** Are personal ties really the best way to build institutional connections within the network? What are the best avenues for building these ties? What kinds of investments do they require? How might social networking software and other technologies help facilitate these connections?
- **Collaborating in the network:** Are solution sharing, solution coordinating and solution distributing networks feasible? Under what circumstances? Can these networks be extended beyond the environmental movement to include partnerships with organizations in other social movements?

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## About the author

Gideon Rosenblatt is executive director of ONE/Northwest ([www.onenw.org](http://www.onenw.org)), a Seattle-based nonprofit that uses technology to connect and engage people and organizations in order to protect the environment of the Pacific Northwest. ONE/Northwest has just completed a strategic plan to guide its work over the next five years that draws heavily from conclusions of the Movement as Network model.

Before joining ONE/Northwest, Gideon held a variety of senior management positions in marketing and product development over the course of ten years at Microsoft. While there he pioneered some of the company's earliest work on the Internet and founded CarPoint, one of Microsoft's most successful consumer businesses. He received his MBA in marketing from the Wharton School in 1991 after spending several years doing business consulting work in China. Gideon is a partner in Seattle Social Venture Partners where he is active in strengthening ties between Seattle-area venture philanthropists and the region's environmental community. He and his wife, CJ, live in Seattle with their two sons, who were the primary motivation behind Gideon's decision to leave the business world and focus his energies on ensuring a healthy natural world for future generations.

Gideon can be reached by email at [gideon@onenw.org](mailto:gideon@onenw.org).