

Toolkit: Tech Organizing for Climate Justice

Using your power to make change at work



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Introduction

The Crisis

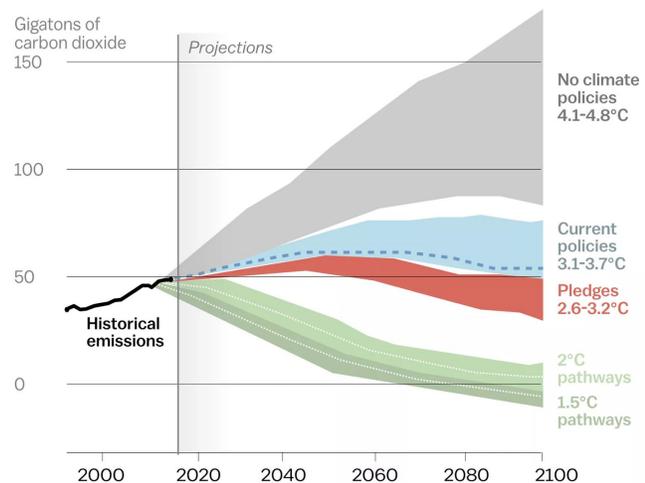
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—a consensus-based body of the United Nations, with representatives from every country—[indicated in October 2018](#) that in order to have a chance of avoiding widespread catastrophe, we must bring global emissions down by 45% *no later than 2030*, and get to zero emissions by 2050. The United States should be leading the world in achieving these goals: we've [contributed more to the problem than any other country](#)

This diagram shows the scenarios scientists use to estimate temperature based on emissions trajectories. The [difference in impact from even half of a degree of warming](#) (between 1.5° Celsius and 2°, or the dark green vs. the light green scenarios above) represents several hundred million more people severely impacted—as well as “significant risk” of hitting threshold tipping points like the destabilization of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets.

Limiting warming to 1.5° Celsius (the dark green scenario) is still possible; with ambition and bold policies, a nearly full transition to renewables is possible within a decade in many places (see the work of [Mark Jacobson](#), among [others](#)). And tech companies can be part of the solution. Companies like Apple and Google have made some progress: Google [achieved its goal of 100%](#) renewable energy for all of its operations and data centers in 2017; Apple's data centers have been powered by 100% renewable energy since 2014, and its global

Effect of current pledges and policies

Global greenhouse gas emissions



Source: Climate Action Tracker

Vox

operations have been [100% renewably powered since 2018](#). Logistics giant UPS plans to convert [half of its NYC delivery fleet to electric by 2022](#).

But no company is acting like there's an emergency at hand, and inertia and business-as-usual thinking mean that most companies tout incremental changes as bold leadership. Most companies' renewable energy progress includes at least some purchases of carbon offset credits, which don't reduce pollution at the source. Google, Microsoft, and Amazon are all creating custom artificial intelligence and machine learning solutions [for oil and gas companies to accelerate extraction](#). Apple's supply chain is still not zero, or even net zero, emissions. Some (like Microsoft, most recently) also join groups like the [Climate Leadership Council](#), which were formed by the fossil fuel industry, and support policies that would protect the industry from liability for its [decades of misinformation](#).

Climate Justice

Addressing the climate crisis is not just about emission reduction; it's about [righting structural inequities](#) that enabled the crisis in the first place. Fossil fuel companies and other polluters have made enormous profits by externalizing the costs and harms onto communities at the frontlines of their pollution—which are disproportionately [communities of color](#), [Indigenous nations](#), and low-income communities. Further, extreme weather and disasters from climate change [harm black, brown, and poor communities](#) most.

As corporations take action to limit their carbon footprints, it's important that employees and communities hold them accountable for addressing these intersecting injustices that their carbon footprints have directly contributed to.

A discussion about climate change without addressing the institutionalized racism that has enabled and accelerated the crisis is an incomplete discussion that can result in significant blindspots when it comes to determining solutions. For example: Ignoring the realities of climate justice would mean that a climate solution based on offsets would be acceptable. In reality, offsets do nothing to reduce the pollution and harm at the places where emissions are created and accept that we will continue to have ["sacrifice zones"](#) where people live, disproportionately people who are black or brown.

The Role of Tech Workers

Many of us went into tech because we wanted to change the world; this is our chance to do so in a meaningful way: by developing organizing skills and leveraging our power and job security, we can help push our employers to:

- Quickly transition to renewable power and full decarbonization in all operations, including supply chains. When setting emissions reduction goals, corporations need to invest in transformative solutions, [without relying on offsets](#), on timelines consistent with the latest [climate science](#).
- Publicly advocate for transformative energy policies at every level of government, and support candidates who genuinely understand the urgency of the climate crisis.
- End support of the fossil fuel industry, such as selling Artificial Intelligence or designing systems that help the industry [extract more fuel more quickly](#) and cheaply.
- Ensure that employee retirement plans are not invested in fossil fuel companies.
- Ensure that all workers, including hourly and contract workers, are treated fairly and provided recovery support during climate-related disruptions.
- Ensure that transitions from dirty energy prioritize [mitigating harm to frontline communities](#).

Because our skills are highly valued, well paid, and competitive, tech workers have an extraordinary amount of power, and we can take risks that are more difficult for many other workers. We also tend to have networks and friends with similar levels of privilege.

Therefore, as individuals and as a group, we're essential to calling on companies and governments worldwide to take urgent, bold action addressing the climate crisis.

Start a Climate Justice Campaign In Your Workplace: Organizing Essentials

Imagine if tech employees were organizing for climate justice across the globe. Our industry could be a force for the transformational change we need, instead of propping up last century's dirty energy companies by helping to extract the fossil fuels that destabilize ecosystems and nations worldwide.

Middle-of-the-road policies and consumer choices aren't enough: The climate crisis is too big and too fast for that, and the [entrenched interests that have lied for decades](#) are still too powerful. But:

Concern about climate crisis + Good organizing = Change

What *is* organizing, really? It's bringing people with one or more common concerns together, and helping them to leverage their skills and voices so that together, we are stronger than the sum of our parts (it's [systems theory](#), really). It's a new skill for most of us: curiosity, openness, and respect for the experiences and thoughts of others will help you learn fast.

Why Organize?

Tech (and other) corporations won't voluntarily "do the right thing" on climate—not at the scale the crisis requires—because it takes upfront investment that competes with maximizing short-term profits. Most corporate climate initiatives are motivated by lowering costs; they make incremental, efficiency-based changes that couldn't reduce emissions at the rate or amount required even if they were implemented broadly. It's going to take real pressure to compel companies to take action at the scale and speed required by the climate crisis.

Here's how tech workers have gotten big wins through organizing:

- 2018:
 - March: *Facebook*: Food service workers organized, with tech workers acting in solidarity. Workers won the right to unionize without opposition, and won higher wages, health insurance, and pensions.
 - April/May: *Google*: Tech workers organized internal pressure, including publishing an employee letter, against Google's contract with the Pentagon to supply AI for military use (Project Maven). Google conceded by not renewing its Pentagon contract and agreed to develop AI ethics principles.
 - May: *Amazon*: Though it initially opposed a board diversity shareholder resolution, Amazon's board adopted it after tech workers raised vocal concerns in internal discussion lists, which leaked and were covered in press.
 - June: *Microsoft*: Tech workers organized an employee sign-on letter to oppose the company's sales of facial recognition to ICE and law enforcement for surveillance. Microsoft conceded with a public call for regulation.

- November: *Google*: 20,000 Google workers walked out over sexism, sexual harassment, and the company's history of compensating abusers. They won changes to forced arbitration clauses in their contracts.
- 2019:
 - February: *Amazon*: Tech workers collectively filed a shareholder resolution and organized thousands of coworkers to support a company-wide climate plan. Amazon responded with its first-ever shipping emission reduction goal and commitment to disclose its carbon footprint. (See [Amazon Case Study](#))
 - July: *Microsoft*: Microsoft suspends its PAC donations after employees boycott and speak out over the lack of transparency and conflict of values in how the PAC funds are being used.

How To Organize: One-on-Ones

Organizing a team begins with having “one-on-ones.” A one-on-one is simply a coffee or a beer or a walk with someone you think might be concerned about the climate crisis. Finding people with a “healthy anger” about inaction on climate can be especially productive, because they’re likely to already understand the limitations of working within the system. How do you find them?

- Through casual conversations
- In climate movement groups in your community (350 local groups, the Sunrise Movement, Extinction Rebellion, Sierra Club)
- In other labor or progressive groups (e.g., Tech Workers Coalition)
- In sustainability clubs/green teams (caveat: members of these groups may be more focused on individual consumer choices rather than system change, and these are often company-sponsored teams)
- On your floor, at the neighboring table... you’d be surprised how many people are privately despairing about the climate crisis but don’t find outlets to talk about it at work. Sometimes sharing your own story, and asking questions, uncovers shared concerns you didn’t know were there.
- By asking someone supportive to connect you with other people they know who might be interested in talking.

To set up a one-on-one, ask someone directly to meet; often, direct messaging or in person can get a better response than email, which gets buried in inboxes. Keep the ask simple and

open-ended. For example, you could say: "I'm concerned about the climate crisis and I'd like to talk with other people who feel similarly. Would you be interested in meeting for coffee or a walk and chatting?"

Conducting a One-on-One

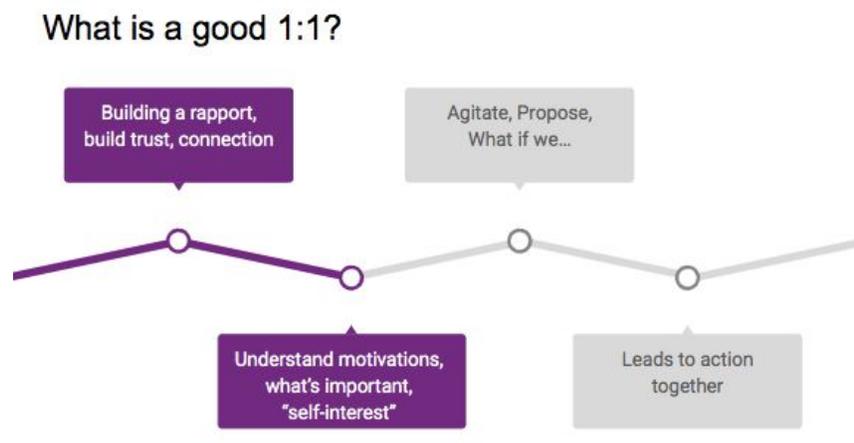
[Here's a simple outline](#) of how to conduct a one-on-one: mostly, ask the other person about their background, find out if they have any personal relationship to the climate crisis, and let them talk about their interests and life; this is not a chance for you to expound about your views on the world with a sympathetic audience.

Your only real goal in this conversation is to get to know them, begin to establish trust and rapport, and learn a bit about how and why they might be motivated to work on a campaign with you.

Curiosity is a good mindset for these conversations—why does a person spend their time (or money) on an activity? Who is most important in their lives—family, friends, a particular community? What experiences and stories have led to where they are today? However, remember—this is about building a relationship, not a 20-question interview! If you share a personal story, especially one that shows vulnerability, it can help break down walls and encourage others to open up— just don't dominate the conversation.

In particular, try to understand where their self-interest is, especially if they're motivated to tackle the climate crisis. Is it because they have young children? Because they love to ski? Because their home state/country is

highly vulnerable to, or already suffering from, climate breakdown? Knowing these things can help you understand them on a deeper level. It can also point to what kind of engagement they might want to have, what kind of story they'll bring to any testimony, and who else they might want to engage in the campaign.



Before parting, make sure you have their contact information and whether they'd like to be on a group mailing list. If they want to be more involved, exchange *personal* contact information so you can communicate more freely.

When to Have One-on-Ones

At the start of a campaign, you may spend a few weeks, or even a few months, having one-on-ones with anyone you meet who might be interested in joining a campaign. When you've found several people who want to engage, have your first meeting (this [link](#) has some good information on meetings). If there are new people that you or others want to engage after the meetings have started, it's helpful to *still* start with a one-on-one with them, to understand what motivates them, and whether they're a good fit for your campaign team.

In some cases, having a single one-on-one with someone might be enough to then invite them to a meeting and have a high level of confidence that they'll come. In other cases, you might meet with someone a few times before they really know that they want to plug in, and can see a natural place for themselves in what you're doing. It's important to be patient; some people who are slow to join might be among the most valuable in the long run. Some people, though, simply aren't a good fit for organizing—especially if their relational skills aren't strong. These folks can still be a real asset to the campaign (doing research, contributing tech tools, or making art, for example), so make sure you're thinking about *all* the needs of the campaign when you talk to people.

In addition to people who you know are concerned about climate change, you should also have one-on-ones with informal leaders or influencers within the company—not people who are high up the corporate ladder (for whom there might be barriers to engagement, especially with their direct reports), but rather peers who are widely admired in a given department or building or network. Informal leaders are those whom others go to for advice, or who instigate the lunches or happy hours that everyone likes to join.

All one-on-ones, but especially those with informal leaders, should be conducted by people who are informed about climate change and the campaign's possibilities (even if it's in the idea phase), comfortable sharing their own stories, and good listeners: you may only get one chance to interest the person in your campaign. It's also very helpful if you take notes right after the meeting (not during—don't make people feel like they're in an interview!), so it's easier to keep track of who has what interests and skills.

Form an Organizing Committee

As you start engaging with coworkers who share your motivation, it's helpful to form an Organizing Committee, as well as teams of supporters. Many people may want to take part in your campaign, but not have a lot of time. Others may be willing to spend a lot of time (in one-on-ones, for example, or in research or another role), but have little interest in other aspects of the organizing. It can be helpful to think about engagement as concentric rings—the inner circle being people most involved in organizing and campaign strategy, supported by the next ring (of people taking on particular functions or roles), supported by a bigger ring of people who agree with the cause and can join in actions.

An Organizing Committee is the core of people who are organizing and guiding campaign strategy. It might start with as few as three people, or as many as a dozen—somewhere in between tends to be a sweet spot for a small group to get started together, and offer different perspectives and skills so that strategy and tasks are well thought-through and distributed.

When forming your Organizing Committee, think about representation in your group. How does your committee reflect the demographics of your workforce? Whose voices are you listening to and raising up to leadership? The tech industry tends to have underrepresentation of women, non-binary folks, and people of color, particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people. Yet the climate crisis disproportionately impacts [communities of color](#), [Indigenous nations](#), and [women](#). Those who are most impacted by the problem must have a seat at the table when discussing solutions.

It takes ongoing relationship-building to create a diverse team, and it's essential to take the time—even if that means [slowing down](#)—to be intentional in how you're organizing. The genuine urgency of the climate crisis can sometimes create a [culture that unintentionally repeats patterns of oppression](#). It's essential that we build a strong movement with diverse leadership. It's not only the right thing to do, but also helps us WIN.

Here are some of the most important initial tasks of an Organizing Committee (these are not sequential, and it's good to be nimble—you'll probably start with "finding common ground", but the other relationship-building pieces will probably come in parallel with the vision):

- Create a vision together
 - What are your company's climate justice impacts?
 - What are your demands?

- Start thinking about your story! (for details, see [below](#))
- Build relationships
 - Find common ground
 - Get buy-in on how to move forward
 - Decide how you'll make [decisions](#)

Doing Your Research and Setting Your Demands

Knowing your company's policies, and the context in which they take place (e.g. what other companies are doing, and what politicians/governmental policies the company supports), is invaluable. So do your research!

Here are some common issues and questions that apply to a wide range of companies:

- How will your company's business practices contribute to an equitable, carbon-free economy?
 - What are all the ways your company relies on fossil fuels?
 - What fossil fuel dependencies exist in your company's own operations as well as supply chains and subcontracted services?
 - Sample areas to think about: data centers, warehouses, offices, manufacturing plants, shipping goods between steps in the supply chain or to customers, etc
 - To what extent does your company's business model rely on cheap, abundant fossil fuels (and therefore face [financial risk](#))?
 - To what extent is your company facing [climate-related disruption costs](#)?
 - Does your company have goals to transition all these fossil fuel dependencies to clean renewables?
 - Are these goals in line with the [IPCC timeline](#)? (Hint: Almost no one's are!)
 - Are the goals published publicly for transparency and accountability?

- Are goals and progress updates reported on publicly with full context of the company's operations? (e.g. It's hard to evaluate reports that state megawatts of renewable energy without putting it in context of overall operational energy use)
 - Do your company's climate goals or existing initiatives rely on offsets instead of a transition to clean renewables?
 - Offsets can be problematic for a number of reasons, including [harm to Indigenous communities](#) and enabling pollution to continue to be generated at its source, which disproportionately harms communities of color. Offsets may also divert investments away from transitioning whole systems off fossil fuels, which is the systemic change we need.
 - Do your company's climate plans include a focus on equity to prioritize reducing harm to workers and frontline communities?
 - Are there policies about how workers, especially hourly and contract workers, are treated during climate-related disruptions and disasters? (e.g. Are workers paid if operations must close during an extreme weather event? What are the working conditions during heat waves, wildfire smoke events, etc?)
 - Who is living in the communities around the facilities and infrastructure your company depends on? How can transition plans reduce pollution in these communities first?
- How is your company enabling the fossil fuel industry to continue extracting coal, oil, and gas, and at the same time dodging responsibility for the climate crisis?
 - Does your company sell specialized products/services to [fossil fuel companies](#)?
 - Does your company offer platforms, including ad platforms, for the fossil fuel industry to continue spreading its lies?
 - Is your company a member of fossil fuel industry-backed efforts, including climate-denying or delaying business groups like [Climate Leadership Council \(CLC\)](#), [US Chamber of Commerce](#), [ALEC](#) or [Competitive Enterprise Institute \(CEI\)](#)?
 - Does your company's [PAC donate](#) to climate-denying or delaying [politicians](#)?
 - Has your company been publicly outspoken in support of climate policy at the state or federal levels, and spoken out against climate-delaying policies?

When you've done your research about where the company is *now*, you can figure out what your demands are. The real demand, of course, is action in line with the magnitude of the crisis—and you should make that clear in the way you talk about the campaign, because the world's [11-year deadline](#) is a reality we need to hammer home whenever we can.

You may want to start with a couple of concrete proposals that may be achievable over the near term (say, a year), as well as a long-term vision of full decarbonization, so that you can win something and then use that energy to escalate to the tougher demands. For example, the Amazon campaign centered on the need for a company-wide plan at the scale and urgency of the crisis, while also putting pressure on the fact that Amazon is the only big tech company without carbon footprint disclosure—a simpler demand won within a few months.

What's Your Story?

Once you have some unity on where your company is now and where you're trying to move it to, you should think carefully about the [story](#) you're putting out to the world.

Your employer's story is probably classic business-as-usual, and something like:

- *Climate change is real*
- *We're already doing our part and making some efforts*
- *Governments need to act; carbon pricing will level the playing field and incentivize the right choices*
- *Consumers should make good choices*

All of which may be true, but they add up to, essentially, "hey, if we're doing as much as most other companies, it's not our problem."

Your story—a much fuller picture of the truth—is probably along the lines of:

- *Climate breakdown is already devastating some communities and is an impending catastrophe worldwide*
- *Governments and corporations need to make radical changes quickly to forestall the worst impacts*

- *We are all responsible for stepping up to this moment and changing what's politically possible, and individual actions and solutions that only a handful of people can afford (solar panels, electric cars) are only a small piece of the puzzle. We can't let our companies say "we need to wait for government actions." Companies like ours need to do the right thing by leading on X, Y, and Z.*
- *We, the workers at this company, care deeply about taking bold and equitable action in this time of climate emergency, and are holding the company accountable to do our part. We want to show climate leadership.*

Your First Move

Once you have an initial team, research, a starting set of demands, and an idea of your story, you need to figure out your first move. Consider both strategies (e.g., “contrast the urgency of the crisis with the steps our company is taking”) and tactics (e.g. a shareholder resolution, a petition to the CEO paired with an op-ed, or a walkout).

Generally, it's best to consider tactics that build on each other and help you win in two complementary ways:

1. Achieve your demands (or subsets of your demands in stages)
2. Build collective employee power within your company, so you can achieve more demands in the future

Test the Campaign As You Go!

The best tactics also function as tests that show you how you're progressing towards winning your demands and building power.

“Tests” are measurable actions that people can be asked to take, and that they can either agree or decline; this helps you assess the likely success of your campaign. Tests answer the question “are we organized yet?” They happen in the buildup to your first move and thereafter. Don't just guess if you're ready—use tests so you know!

Early examples: people turning out to lunch/after work workshops and trainings, survey participation, signing a letter, getting their friends to sign a letter, showing up to a rally or large-scale event.

Sign-on Letter as a First Tactic

A sign-on letter is a great first move to launch a campaign, because:

1. A letter can serve as mass education, laying out the problems of the climate crisis, how your company fits into the problem, and explaining your demands.
2. The letter functions as a test (on who agrees to sign their name to it), and in particular, a test that you can run in a distributed way over a longer period of time (unlike an event where even your most dedicated supporters may have unavoidable scheduling conflicts).
3. It builds power. People are more invested in the campaign once they have some skin in the game from signing the letter. You also have a concrete list of people who agree with you, whom you can then engage for your next tactic and future actions.
4. It builds pressure for your demands by showing the increasing numbers of people who are with you in demanding climate action at the scale of the crisis.

When drafting a letter, consider balancing an analysis of your company's current climate record with an inspirational vision. Here are a couple examples climate justice letters:

- The open letter from [Amazon Employees for Climate Justice](#)
- The [letter to the CEO](#) from employees at Immediate Media, a UK media company

One question you should confront early on is whether you're asking people to be *public* about their engagement—and in particular, whether the letter and signatures will be published publicly. Talk with your Organizing Committee about this—you'll want to be clear and upfront about this before asking people to sign the letter, so they know what they're agreeing to.

Making the *letter* public (with or without the signature list) can add an important element of pressure, accountability, and mass education on the climate crisis, and it can inspire workers at many other companies to follow your lead. Making the *signatures* public can demonstrate a level of dedication and pride in speaking up for what's right. Furthermore, being public can be a source of protection against retaliation, because there's safety in numbers, and it's harder for companies to pass off retaliation as normal performance management when there's already proof of people's involvement in a moral campaign.

When talking with co-workers about signing the letter, it's important to acknowledge people's fears: no one wants to lose their job, so it's both a question of how likely you think

this is, and if the risk is balanced by one's sense of the urgency of the climate crisis. Never pressure anyone to take a step they're not ready for, but do ask directly and give them the choice.

Acknowledge that fear is valid; never minimize people's feelings around risk. Don't be judgmental of someone's fears, and understand that some people have less ability to take such a risk (for example, if they have small children, parents or other family they're taking care of, or if they're working on a visa). Share your own feelings about the importance of the climate crisis to you, and how you've faced any feelings of fear and come through committed to the cause. Talk with people about why the climate crisis matters to them personally, and how we won't be able to change the business-as-usual path without people collectively taking risks to make change.

Again, safety comes from solidarity in numbers, which is why a coordinated launch of the signature gathering for the letter is important.

How To Launch a Sign-on Letter

When planning the rollout of the letter, here are steps to consider:

- Consult with supporters about the letter in a draft state and how many signatures it would take to make them feel safe to add their names. (Checking with people you already know are supportive gives you feedback before launching broadly and helps you assess whether the letter is on track to be successful.)
- Plan: Decide when you'll publish the letter (at what number of signatures) and where (Medium is good platform).
- Pre-seed the letter in a few rounds. First, get your closest supporters to sign. Next, have everyone ask friends individually, so that you build up signers to show momentum—and safety in numbers—before broadcasting the letter broadly.
 - People are most likely to take action when someone they know asks them directly, so encourage supporters to reach out individually to friends and co-workers.
 - Texts or direct messages are often more successful in getting responses than emails.
- Launch: When you have a pre-seeded set of signatures, broadcast the letter as widely as possible with a coordinated roll-out plan.

- Consider the email discussion lists and other communication mechanisms within your company, and especially networks that may have an overlap with climate concerns.
 - Ask for people in your team and other supporters who have signed in the pre-seed round to volunteer to send the letter to a specific email list, network, or their team. It's best for it to come from an active member of that group or network.
 - Coordinate for everyone to send out the letter broadly on the same day.
 - When people contact others to sign, consider how to tailor the ask. For example:
 - Emailing a list of climbers and hikers? Talk about the impact of climate on the mountains or wildfires.
 - Talking to a group of parents? Have the message come from a fellow parent who can talk about their own concerns for their kids.
 - Contacting an alumni group? Make a connection about how climate change is impacting the place where your alma mater is located.
 - Is a supporter already an active member of an affinity group network (e.g. Black employees) or an anti-racism group? They could talk about how the climate crisis and fossil fuel production disproportionately impacts communities of color.
 - Keep encouraging supporters to ask friends individually to sign; this reaches people not paying attention to discussion lists, and people are more likely to act when a friend asks them.
- Communicate: Have a mechanism for communicating with all letter signers (e.g. adding them all to a moderated email list, so the volume of messages is low, but you can send announcements, updates, and next steps about the campaign). Update your supporters about significant milestones in letter signature numbers, and encourage them to ask their friends to sign.
- Publish and/or deliver the letter!

Tactics Beyond the Sign-on Letter

Because the goal of restoring the planet to stability is decidedly long-term, it's important to think not only about your first move, but also about the longer arc of the campaign. What might you set your sights on *after* your first tactic, win or lose?

[Take part](#) in the [Global Climate Walkout on September 20th!](#)

Inspired by [Greta Thunberg](#) and the millions of students worldwide who've engaged in #FridaysForFuture and #ClimateStrike walkouts from school, this will be a worldwide action by adults in a position to support the kids, because...

“It’s sometimes annoying when people say, ‘Oh you children, you young people are the hope. You will save the world’” she said, after several grown-ups had told her just that. “I think it would be helpful if you could help us just a little bit.”

As a group, tech workers are among the most job-secure people in the world. If tens or hundreds of thousands of us worldwide participate in the walkout, and add our voices to the youth call for urgent and transformative action on climate...it could be transformative. We know there's not much time between now and September 20th, so starting to gather a team now, and build a base of supporters through a sign-on letter will establish a base for future action.

Going Public With the Campaign

As you get close to the public launch of the campaign (the moment when you publish the letter, or take another public action like holding a climate walkout or filing a shareholder resolution), you should think more broadly about messaging.

Messaging isn't just your demands and story; it's also the *way* you talk about those things. Find common ground in your team about what tone you'll take, and write down the

common phrases and lines you'll use; if there's harmony among the different voices, your message will be much clearer and more resonant.

Message Strategy

"Hero messaging" is often a good fit for workplace organizing—talk about your pride in what you do. If you're also proud of some of the values and accomplishments of your company, talk about that too. Talk about how you and your coworkers care deeply about the climate crisis, and want to make your company even better and encourage it to show leadership. For example, in the Amazon campaign, workers talked about innovation, customer obsession, and a deep respect for data-driven decisions, then pointed out the lack of climate action.

Here's a hero messaging quote from one [press release](#) from the Amazon campaign: "Climate change threatens every shareholder, customer, and citizen on earth. Amazon is a global leader in innovation, and our rightful place in the climate crisis is at the forefront, not lagging behind our peers."

[This Gizmodo interview with one of the employees](#) is a terrific example of mixing hero messaging with a bit of personal history and the desire for more meaning in one's work to tell a story that will likely resonate with a lot of other tech workers. The article underscores the fact that going public was also a source of pride for this person.

Press

[Here are some guidelines](#) on press advisories (sent to media in advance), press releases (day of, sometimes both before and after), and pitch calls. All of these assume you have a press list—an allied group might be willing to share theirs, or you might have to start from scratch, finding names, emails, and ideally phone numbers of reporters who have covered your company, tech in general, and/or climate change. These days, journalists lose or change jobs very frequently, so starting from scratch can be a useful research project for someone. Twitter bios can be a useful source for journalists' contact info.

If you know that there's something *unique* about your campaign, mention it in press communications. Apart from that, you're simply trying to tell—very succinctly!—the story of why you're doing the thing you're doing, and what you want from it. You're trying to frame what's happening clearly: the climate crisis is unthinkable urgent/we are currently failing but are capable of succeeding/here's one thing that for sure we should be doing.

Pitch calls are very important—getting a reporter (especially one that you know covers the tech industry or climate) on the phone and being able to make even a small personal

connection can make a big difference. Short of that, the main things driving whether you get press or not are whether they think there will be something visual, high tension, new and noteworthy, or otherwise striking about what you're doing, and whether there are other high priority news stories filling up their capacity and publishing calendars that day.

Decide in advance if some people will give interviews. Prepare a talking points document with anticipated questions and sample answers based on your messaging. Have your spokespeople practice giving interviews about the campaign to one another, so you can learn from each other, and share common frames even when you also embellish these with individual stories you may have (as you should!). Remember, when communicating with a journalist, it's safest to assume that everything (including pre-interview email exchanges) is "on the record" and could be quoted. [Here are tips on how to give a good interview](#), including how to pivot to your own framing and not reiterate a journalist's frame.

And Afterwards?

It's important to keep in mind that even if you fail to win any changes from your first tactic, you've probably accomplished quite a lot, especially if you prioritized the relationship-building and developing an organizing team and a broader constituency at work (e.g., all those signers, if you had a letter). Thus, you have a base from which to try something new (or even the same thing, again, if it's a good strategy/tactic that simply needs more time), and you've helped people wake up to the power they have to act collectively. Honestly, that may be the *most* important result of any campaign you run.

If you do win some changes from your first tactic, congratulations! That means it's time to celebrate... and start activating your *second* move, if you haven't done so already. Regardless of the outcome of your first move, it's important to build into your team culture some time to appreciate all that you've accomplished. Take time to reflect, debrief, show appreciation for your Organizing Committee, and perhaps throw a happy hour or gathering with a broader group of supporters to connect with people in person.

Need some advice?

[Contact us! \(tech@350Seattle.org\)](mailto:tech@350Seattle.org)

350 Seattle is a grassroots, volunteer-driven group, and we do [many, many things](#). We're deeply committed to the climate fight and excited by the possibilities in tech worker organizing; many of our active volunteers work in the tech industry.

[Amazon Employees for Climate Justice](#) is a grassroots, worker-led group that grew out of the climate shareholder resolution. We're passionate about climate justice and excited to collaborate with workers across the tech industry.

We're happy to give a little advice and/or make a connection as we can. Also, get in touch if you'd like to stay in the loop for any trainings or additional toolkits and resources in the future.

[Not too cool, Alexa.](#)

Getting Started, Honing In

We formed an Organizing Committee of Amazon tech workers to figure out how we could shift the company towards climate leadership. After consultation with experts in corporate advocacy, we decided to file a shareholder resolution as a first step. We weighed the pros and cons on this; the SEC is very strict in what it allows in such resolutions, so we couldn't specify concrete demands. We also understood that almost all resolutions fail to pass—but even failed resolutions have successfully pressured companies to change and raised the visibility of the issue. The goals, then, were:

1. To raise the issue of climate justice directly with the highest level of the company: Jeff Bezos and the Board
2. Spur company-wide discussion and build pressure internally among tech workers
3. Pressure the company externally through media. We learned through past press situations that Amazon leadership cares a lot about public and customer perception as influenced by high-profile media coverage.

As we crafted our overall story, we particularly wanted to highlight the ways that Amazon's climate inaction doesn't square with the company's self-image as innovative, customer-obsessed, and a leader; rather, it's a company powered by coal, diesel, and jet fuel, at a moment in time when those things are known to be a direct threat to human civilization. We were motivated by the tension between the internal [leadership principles](#) (a core cultural element in our workplace) and how Amazon is lagging behind on climate action. We also focused on the stories of tech workers who have been impacted by the climate crisis, who feel conflicting values with the company's inaction and want to see climate leadership, to humanize the effort and draw out more coworkers who could relate.

The Resolution Launch

In late November and early December 2018, 12 current and former employees, who held Amazon shares from stock grants, put forth a [shareholder resolution](#) asking the company to release a plan to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and respond to climate disruptions. In parallel, we contacted a New York Times journalist who we knew had covered tech worker activism in the past and pitched our story. The NYT agreed to publish an exclusive article about our action; this was the first time that a group of employee-shareholders had used company stock to agitate for change.

While the exclusive article was being written, we developed a media and outreach plan: we crafted the messaging and talking points, trained and practiced interviewing among ourselves, created a target list of journalists across media outlets, drafted a press release, and created an internal outreach plan. A week before the shareholder resolution filing deadline, the [NYT published the story](#) on the front-page of the business section. That same day, we sent the press release to our list of journalists and started giving interviews. Simultaneously we launched the internal outreach by emailing many internal discussion lists and hosting a few lunch-and-learn educational workshops. We invited people to take action in support of our shareholder resolution—joining us in co-filing, if they met certain legal requirements, and joining a new internal supporters list to show they're behind the resolution.

One lesson we learned is that taking an action with a hard deadline, like the resolution filing cutoff date, was a forcing function that energized the whole team to pitch in on the work and feel more invested in the cause. We also knew it was important for this action to be visibly supported by a wide range of people, not just the few people who were publicly giving interviews. So we enlisted the help of dozens of supporters, divvying up email lists for outreach across many people.

By the end of that week, at the resolution filing deadline, we had a total of 28 people who had co-filed the resolution and hundreds of employees who had signed on in support by joining the email list.

An Early Misstep

Though we'd incorporated social justice in our messaging and education, our original group was mostly white, and we'd failed to use an anti-racist lens in our outreach, which meant our co-filers were also white-dominated. An anti-racist lens would have helped us think systematically about who we wanted to have at the table, and prioritize relationship-building with Black, Latinx, and Indigenous employees, who are underrepresented in tech. Being actively anti-racist is important first and foremost because it's the right thing to do—and it's also important strategically: a movement can't be powerful without the voices and leadership of the communities most impacted.

So though we thought of ourselves as allies in the fight for justice, we were perpetuating the systemic racism in the tech industry that makes it harder for underrepresented people to join and flourish in the industry. Dealing with racism in everyday work, overcoming barriers to entry, being on a visa; these can all increase the risks of organizing, and we wanted to find ways for people to get involved that were sensitive to these factors,

including less public roles, and also warmly welcome people who weren't concerned about being more visible.

It's important to note, that while we were heavily white-dominated (and still are, though to a lesser degree), the leadership and work of a couple employees of color has been key to the success and strategy in all parts of our campaign. Also, strong female leadership in the group has been part of the reason for addressing this misstep and prioritizing anti-racism in our work.

In the months since, we've prioritized relationship-building with people of color who express interest in the campaign, and with affinity groups based on racial and ethnic identity across the company. We're also piloting anti-racism education for our organizers. To be clear, it's not about checking the box with a certain percentage of representatives; it's about building relationships for the long term and building stronger movements through the intersections across issues. This takes time and attention, and we expect to keep learning as we practice anti-racism in our organizing.

We are also learning that anti-racist organizing isn't solely about representation; it's also about showing up and using our platform to elevate voices that have historically been marginalized. In July, Amazon warehouse workers outside Minneapolis reached out to our group asking for [support](#). While a few people in our group were hesitant lending our effort to what appeared to be a "different cause" from the climate crisis, the majority of us felt strongly about supporting the warehouse workers because being an anti-racist organization means showing up. This decision to lend solidarity was led by employees of color in the group. In contrast with corporate tech workers, Amazon warehouse workers are [disproportionately people of color](#). Even if the issues of climate and labor weren't intimately connected—which [they are](#)—we still need to demonstrate solidarity if we want to consider anti-racism as a part of our organizing values. As a mostly white, well-paid group of tech workers with a prominent media presence, how should we use our privilege and platform?

After the Resolution, A First Win... and Some Bad News

Filing the shareholder resolution was just the start of the campaign. In January, investor relations invited us to a meeting with sustainability leadership, which we had anticipated—because shareholder resolutions are a legal process that the company must recognize. We came prepared with questions, but left feeling dissatisfied that there didn't appear to be a comprehensive, company-wide climate plan in the works (e.g. one with goals and buy-in from top leadership across the company). They also refused to disclose any carbon footprint data, or to give a date to the goal of running on 100% renewable energy. We knew we had to bring more pressure by engaging an even bigger group of employees.

Learning from past sign-on letters from tech workers across the industry on issues like facial recognition and contracts with ICE, we decided to collect signatures for a letter to the board asking them to adopt the resolution. Going a step further, we wanted people to agree to put their name publicly on the letter. We knew that would show a higher commitment and engagement from employees and build more power in the action.

When we started contacting supporters for feedback on the first draft of the letter, and getting a sense of whether people would be willing to publicly sign, some got so excited by it that they sent it around more broadly than intended. Within one day, our supporters email list jumped from 600 to 1200. We were nervous that company leadership had also seen our letter before we were ready, but it turned out to have a good effect!

Five days later, Amazon announced "[Shipment Zero](#)" with great fanfare. It was the first time Amazon had set any goal of reducing shipping pollution and it included a commitment to release its carbon footprint—a flip from the answer in our meeting with leadership. The next day, Amazon reached out to us asking if we would withdraw our resolution in light of their commitment to Shipment Zero. This is how we know our pressure had a direct effect on the company's climate action. Unfortunately, the Shipment Zero goal is still inadequate; there's no date on the 100% net-zero goal and the goal of 50% net-zero shipments by 2030 doesn't include a current baseline. So, given the company's rate of growth, total emissions will still be higher in 2030 than today!

And it gets worse: that same week, we [learned from Gizmodo](#) that the company is aggressively pursuing business with the oil & gas industry:

These documents, combined with industry pitches and case studies on AWS's own website, show that beginning in at least 2017, Amazon has begun a targeted campaign to win oil, gas, and coal business at a time that scientists say it is imperative most fossil fuels be left in the ground if we are to avoid severe climate disruption. All while the company was renegeing on, or at best indefinitely idling, its own pledges to build more clean energy.

While we weren't willing to withdraw the resolution based on Shipment Zero alone, we did tell Investor Relations that we'd be happy to meet with them to discuss what it would take. In this meeting we said we'd need 1) a date for our 100% renewable energy commitment, and 2) stopping our partnerships with AWS Oil and Gas customers in which we create custom solutions to help them find and extract oil and gas more quickly. Amazon's leadership seemed surprised when we brought up the company's AWS Oil & Gas department. This was extremely disconcerting, and showed us that there isn't a

comprehensive plan throughout the company. Because Amazon wouldn't agree to our two asks, we didn't withdraw the resolution.

Upping the Ante

We realized we had to ask our fellow employees to support not just the resolution, but also a set of demands more in line with the scale of the crisis. The fact that Amazon leadership thought Shipment Zero was enough was telling—the senior leadership team still wasn't committed to the scale of changes required to adequately address the climate crisis and Amazon's own contributions to it.

We re-wrote the [open letter](#) to the Board outlining principles for what leadership in climate justice looks like and how Amazon is currently falling short. We tackled the company PR's main talking points, including Shipment Zero, to educate our co-workers on why it wasn't enough. We also put a bigger emphasis on the racial and social injustices inherent in the climate crisis. We wrapped this all in inspirational language, to help employees feel how much of an impact we'll have if we make significant changes. In parallel, we were reaching out to employees in affinity groups (e.g. identity-based internal networks) for their feedback.

We had a goal of 1,000 signatures in order to publish the letter, but, we felt nervous that we wouldn't get enough employees to sign this much stronger letter. Some team members thought we needed to tone it back down; others felt that we needed to hold strong. We decided to do some "user research," consulting with more supporters—overwhelmingly, people were onboard with putting their names on this letter!

So we put our outreach plan into action. First, we collected pre-seed signatures from people on our supporters list, by directly messaging them. Over 200 people signed within a day. Early the next morning, we internally broadcast the letter far and wide—we enlisted the help of dozens of supporters to email a wide range of discussion lists and message their friends individually.

We encouraged everyone who signed to send it to their teammates and directly ask their friends to sign. We learned how big a difference it makes when someone you already know asks you individually to take action, as team members were seeing a much better success rate when they messaged their friends directly. By the end of the second day, the letter had over 3,000 signatures, far surpassing our goal!

On the third day, [The New York Times again covered the story](#) with an exclusive article, we launched another round of press outreach, and the signatures kept growing—to 4,200 by

the end of the third day and to 6,000 by the end of the week. (The letter now has over 8,000 signatures and still climbing—more than 10% of Amazon’s US corporate employees).

As we were doing the outreach, we focused on our individual stories of how we feel about and have already been affected by climate change, with more emotional and heart-felt sentiments than is typical for workplace emails. More people got involved in interviewing with reporters as well. For many in our team, being public about this campaign became a source of pride, and telling our personal stories helped us connect with more of our coworkers. The power of personal stories, and speaking vulnerably from the heart, cannot be undersold here; that was critical to the spread of the letter and our continued media coverage.

In addition to lots of outreach to fellow employees, we began outreach to institutional investors to advocate for our resolution. With support and advice from experts in the shareholder resolution process, we developed briefs supporting our resolution and scheduled advocacy meetings with investor advisory services. Early in May, the leading proxy advisory firms, Glass Lewis and ISS, which represent 97% of the advisory market, recommended that their clients vote “yes” on the shareholder resolution—yet another win.

The Shareholder Meeting

For the annual shareholder meeting on May 22, we organized employees to attend the meeting together and stand in solidarity when one member of our team gave the speech to introduce the resolution. We wanted to address Jeff Bezos directly and put him on the spot to either support this opportunity to be a climate leader or show us that he isn’t taking the crisis seriously. So before this person started the speech, she asked him to appear from backstage, so she could speak to him directly. Jeff wouldn’t even come on stage to address us; we were prepared for this possibility and made it clear we were requesting him to face us and he had to decline. The speech was a powerful moment, where many audience members joined the employees in standing and many of us were moved to tears.

31% of the shares that voted were cast in our resolution’s favor, which is more than any other environmental-related resolution at Amazon. Media coverage of the annual shareholder meeting centered on the [worker action](#) and the [climate stories](#) of the workers, which is shifting awareness and the conversation in the ways we had hoped—another win.

We are energized and plan to keep building on this progress; many of us feel that this is the most meaningful thing we’ve ever done. The climate crisis isn’t going away and neither are we. We hope more tech workers across the industry will join us—just think what we could do with a cross-tech response to the climate crisis.