

2024
YEAR IN REVIEW

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KATAL
CENTER FOR EQUITY, HEALTH, & JUSTICE



Katal's Annual Stewardship Letter

2024 in Review and Gearing Up for the New Year

By Lorenzo Jones and gabriel sayegh

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In reflecting over this past year and looking toward the next, we keep coming back to this quote from the civil rights and labor organizer Grace Lee Boggs: "What time is it on the clock of the world?" It's an urgent question for the entire country and for our field of community organizing.

These are times of great change, of upheaval and transition, of realignments. But one thing community organizing teaches us is that the future is not written – and together, we can shape it. Over nearly 10 years, Katal has built a track record of taking on big fights, punching far above our weight class – and winning. We do this through the deep, steady work of community organizing for equity, health, and justice. And we know this work will be essential in 2025 and beyond.

Here are some highlights of what we accomplished together in 2024.

- **Through our Building Leadership and Organizing Capacity (BLOC) program, we provided training and coaching for organizers in Connecticut, New York, and beyond.** Trainings we conducted this year included the core mechanics of organizing, methods of social change (and why understanding different methods is so important!), strategy development, running a canvassing program, civic engagement, and how and why to conduct title searches to learn who owns a piece of property. Throughout the year, nearly 1,000 people participated in these trainings, including organizers, activists, advocates, students, farmers, business owners, and foundation staff. And we provided focused coaching hours to dozens of organizers.

- **In Connecticut we expanded Cultivating Justice, our multigenerational project with leadership representing young people, elders, and those in between.** We started Cultivating Justice with our partners in 2022 to nurture Connecticut’s next generation of farmers of color, because 98 percent of all registered farmers in the state are white. As Katal cofounder Lorenzo Jones wrote [in an op-ed](#) this summer connecting organizing, food, racial equity, and justice reform, “Remember, wherever you find people directly impacted by the failed food system, you will find people who are probably impacted by all the other systems that make up the social safety net.” This year, with leadership from program manager Diana Martinez, we hosted multiple trainings, grew our membership, conducted outreach at community events, [fought](#) for and won a five-year lease for [a community farm](#) in Middletown, and literally [got community hands in the dirt](#).
- **We organized throughout Connecticut for reform of the criminal legal system, including probation.** We continued our work to reform the state’s probation system, educating lawmakers and holding community meetings about the problems of mass criminalization. We conducted trainings about probation reform for community residents, students, and advocates around the state. And we joined our allies in actions to [stop solitary confinement](#), demand transparency in the legal system, and more.
- **We brought hundreds of people together for civic engagement and community-building events across Connecticut.** In February, more than 300 people participated in the second annual [Growing Power](#) conference to learn about issues including food justice, agriculture, community organizing, probation reform, and closing prisons. Throughout the year, we organized and mobilized Connecticut residents, including in Bridgeport and Middletown. Hundreds of people joined us at one of our 14 [farm days](#). And in October, as our advocacy coordinator Taina Manick wrote in an [op-ed for The Connecticut Mirror](#), we held our second Harvesting Change vision setting dinner, where “more than 60 families from across Connecticut gathered in Bloomfield for food, fellowship, and organizing for power.” The event also included trainings on probation reform and property title searches.
- **In New York City, we expanded our #ShutRikers organizing and outreach efforts, hitting nearly 70,000 doors and holding thousands of conversations with New Yorkers.** Our organizing team was out all year, [reaching thousands of doors every month](#) – even in the winter cold and summer heat. Policy associate Ricky Forde helped [train young people](#) in civic engagement and policy fellow Aryssa Speirs led [outreach sessions at libraries](#) across the city. We were in Harlem with young people this summer, [conducting outreach to #ShutRikers](#). Our state organizing director, Melanie Dominguez, [was on NY1’s “Inside City Hall”](#) with political anchor Errol Louis, discussing our #ShutRikers campaign. We held a number of [#ShutRikers community conversations](#), more than half a dozen #ShutRikers info sessions, and [biweekly phone zaps](#) with our members and supporters. And for the local elections, we worked with our allies to conduct extensive get-out-the-vote efforts in the fall to [combat a mayoral power grab](#).

- **We built a ton of momentum in our push for a federal receiver to take over at Rikers until the jail complex is finally shut down.** Until we can #ShutRikers once and for all, we keep fighting to improve conditions for the people incarcerated and employed there. That's why we've kept up the pressure this year for a federal receiver to take over, organizing nearly 100 groups to join the fight, hosting numerous info sessions on receivership, and holding multiple marches and rallies with our partners. Receivership is now likely to happen in 2025. Katal's cofounder gabriel sayegh's op-ed in the Amsterdam News succinctly lays out what's been happening since Mayor Eric Adams abandoned the closure plan legally mandated through laws the city passed in 2019 – and why receivership is necessary.
- **In the New York State Legislature, we advanced legislation to make the statewide jail and prison oversight commission more accountable to its mandate.** As our state advocacy director Yonah Zeitz wrote in the Daily News, the State Commission on Correction (SCOC) has the power to “shut down facilities found to be out of compliance in maintaining a safe environment for incarcerated people,” such as the Rikers Island jail complex. But the SCOC has not done so, failing to meet its responsibilities. In the State Senate we successfully passed bipartisan legislation to fix the SCOC, though the State Assembly failed to bring it up for a vote. We're gearing up to get this bill passed and signed into law in 2025. This has significant implications not just for Rikers, but all jails and prisons in New York.
- **Our work drew extensive media coverage this year, in dozens of news stories by local and national outlets.** Our work shaped public discussion and debate, as our members were featured and our perspective included in dozens of media stories. We were featured in the Associated Press, The Hill, Politico, the Daily News, CBS News, THE CITY, The Middletown Press, The Connecticut Mirror, amNY, Filter, Gothamist, News12 The Bronx, Queens Daily Eagle, NY1, 1010Wins, Black Agenda Report, BronxNet TV, WBAI's “On the Count,” Amsterdam News, City & State New York, and more. And we issued dozens of statements and press releases related to our work, all posted on our website.
- **We contributed to movement infrastructure and reflected on organizing practice and history.** We continued our monthly criminal justice reform calls in CT and NY, hosting hundreds of advocates, organizers, and community members. We wrote about the field's need to “revamp our development of organizers” and held an info session about our Apprentice Community Organizer Program that included a presentation by our apprentice organizer Lakenya Smith. We wrote about the 25th anniversary of the WTO protests in Seattle, and published a review of a book about the protests. We wrote about the legacy of movement leaders like NY Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry and activist Jazz Hayden. And with artist Josh MacPhee, we published “#ShutRikers: A Brief History of Movement Graphics in 15 Stickers,” a zine exploring the political images used in movements around the world over the past 100 years.

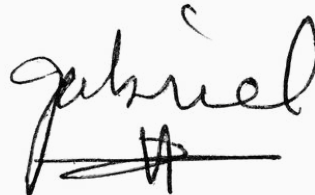
- **We strengthened our operational systems and other internal practices.** Katal’s board, under the leadership of Chair Safiya Simmons, was deeply engaged throughout the year. We earned a platinum transparency seal from Candid, the highest rating for nonprofit transparency. We received a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, also the highest rating. We were awarded a 2024 Great Nonprofits seal. Alycia Gay, our operations director, led us through a rigorous process to update our internal tech security. And our communications and development coordinator, Lily Krug, helped us launch our first sustaining monthly donor drive (which you can still join, or you can make a one-time donation for our work, [here](#).)

It’s been a full year – and we’re readying ourselves for what’s next, whatever that may be. In 2025, we mark the 10th anniversary of Katal’s founding. We couldn’t have made it here without you. Thank you – we’re deeply grateful for your support.

In solidarity,



Lorenzo Jones
Co-founder



gabriel sayegh
Co-founder