

Invoking the Pause Blog Post

Title: 350 Seattle

I love you sun!

I love you water!

I love you air!

I love you earth!



Our Pause formally began by the Skykomish River. We stood along the rocky bed—the river lower, narrower, and calmer in August than most of the year—and followed our facilitator’s direction to repeat after her: *I love you sun! I love you water! I love you air! I love you earth!* And we touched the ground -- a reminder of why we are gathered together in this beautiful place.

When we wrote the grant application for the Pause, we had just won a huge campaign --350 Seattle and our allies had just succeeded in persuading King County, Washington (the 7th largest county in the country) to ban new fossil fuel infrastructure. It was a short and highly successful campaign. We wrote in our Pause application that we wanted to have time to slow down after this win: “Given how busy we are, finding the time for real visioning work is difficult, and the ‘pause’ we’d like to take is a week to do deep strategy work on broadening our City-focused work to include synergistic efforts at the County level. “

In typical grassroots organization and activist fashion, a lot had changed since we submitted our application in March. Slowing down had definitely not happened. In fact, we’d sped up — in early June, we launched the [Seattle for a Green New Deal](#) campaign in partnership with Got Green, a long-time partner and inspiring environmental justice organization. The campaign calls for the city to create its own Green New Deal to eliminate climate pollution by 2030, address

historical injustices, and create thousands of good jobs. This broadened our city work rapidly — within weeks over 150 organizations and businesses endorsed the campaign, and nearly 5,000 people signed a petition in support of it. We got our first demand met nearly immediately — City Attorney Pete Holmes announced he plans to sue the fossil fuel industry. Within weeks, the Seattle City Council not only endorsed the campaign, but passed a resolution in support of it, and now is working to pass binding legislation to ban new gas hookups to residences, to create the funding mechanism for a Green New Deal, and to create a task force with representation from those most affected by the climate crisis, that will continue to develop Green New Deal policy.

This success was heady — and exactly why we needed a Pause: to slow down, take stock, and envision what was newly possible. And also to tend to internal stresses that had come up in launching a huge campaign so fast.

We decided to break our Pause into 3 parts:

Part 1: Evaluate the Seattle for a Green New Deal campaign with our partners at Got Green

Part 2: Bring in four close allies and thought leaders for a day to think big together

Part 3: Do some important assessment of how we can work better together

Day 1 was with Johnny and Nancy from Got Green. We spent the morning sharing stories of meaningful moments and people who'd led us on our journey to this moment. This was powerful -- for folks working on the Green New Deal (GND) campaign who'd been collaborating at high speeds for several months, it was a chance to slow and soften with each other. For members of our Staff Collective who don't work the GND campaign, it was a sweet opportunity to get to know our partners better. From this place of connection, we began to reflect on the campaign -- our values, our strategies, our successes and our areas for growth. We celebrated the wins and the work done, while recognizing that the pace and intensity of this campaign was short-changing some important things, such as our capacity for other important work, ongoing need to fundraise, and longer-term movement-building efforts. We considered big questions (like whether the campaign coalition should grow; what our strategy might look like for 2020 and beyond; how to transform from mobilization to organizing, etc.). We spent a 2-hour lunch down by the river, goofing around and napping in the sun. And we came out of the day with deeper connection, sharper strategy, new communication tools, and a renewed commitment to prioritize in-person meetings (even and especially when things are busy!).

Day 2 was so much fun -- for us and our guests. We invited four thought leaders from our community to join us:

Matt Remle - founder of Mazaska Talks, school counselor, and an indigenous rights activist we've worked closely with

Mike O'Brien - Seattle City Council member and big climate champion, on the national Sierra Club Board

Judy Twedt - leader in UAW 4121, leader of the King County Labor Council's Climate Caucus, and a grad student and climate scientist

Katie Wilson - Secretary of the Transit Riders Union, an economic justice organization that's doing some of the most forward-thinking work in Seattle policy.



We spent the day learning more about each others' work and wrestling with the plethora of opportunities to advance climate policy at the City and County levels. We also struggled with the big unknown of how the November Seattle City Council election will affect what we can accomplish, as well as all the initiatives and campaigns that may emerge in our ecosystem in 2020 (outside our control). In spite of this overwhelm, it became clear that we all deeply value working together, not just because of the "what" of what we do, but the "how": that we are all committed to engaging as many people as possible in changing the climate narrative and passing meaningful policies that address the scale of the climate crisis.

Everyone was excited to spend the day with us and we were able to use Pause funding to offer honoraria to all our partners (except Mike because he's a sitting elected official), which made it possible for them to come.

Days 3 and 4 we spent getting our internal house in order. Day 3 was the hardest of all the days. Our facilitator, Sam, did an amazing job unearthing tensions that had been simmering: some that all of us knew were there, and others that were more surprising. Sam led us through an exercise where we picked which cardinal direction we most identified with: Norths are the doers, Easts are the visionaries, Souths are the feelers, Wests are the questioners. That framework helped us to see our differences and also see them in positive ways. We are fairly West-heavy, which has caused some tension in the Staff Collective.



On Day 4, we pivoted to the question: what are we going to do about the things that aren't working? We are a collective — we have the power and responsibility to change what's not working. So we got to work. Specifically, we talked about the foundational organizational development work that still needs to happen in order for our Staff Collective model and broader distributed leadership structure to work well. We need to create better structures for providing each other support, mentorship, and affirmation; people haven't been getting enough of that because it's nobody's job to do this formally. We also need to create better accountability structures — we don't have a way (yet) to evaluate Staff Collective member performance, for example.

In the spirit of balance, we aimed to finish at 6pm and finished nearly on time. After our fourth very full day of meeting, we retreated to nature to rejuvenate us. The river. The forest path. The hot tub looking over the river.

At our closing evening fire, we connected as friends. We laughed, we shared some tough stuff. We know we're in this together because of our shared love for all living beings on this planet. And it felt good to affirm that in a beautiful place thanks to Invoking the Pause.

We're looking forward to sharing more at the Bay area gathering.

