

Adams Rackes

Please state how your values align with Reclaim Philadelphia's values.

First, a preamble: I answer to he or they pronouns and live in South Philly (First Ward!) with my partner and children. I am descended from Dutch, Scottish, and Eastern European people, grew up in South Carolina, and have lived in Philadelphia since 2003. I am 44. I'm an engineer and teacher by profession (I teach engineering currently). I have been an active Reclaim member since 2016, formerly leading neighborhood groups and the climate justice task force, and I've been on the board since 2020. I wrote a lot in this application, and I would love to know if anyone reads it. If you know me and read this, please send me a text to let me know! Seriously!

My guiding values are freedom, equality, and solidarity. Ideologically I am a democratic socialist and internationalist, and I care deeply about democracy and ordinary people coming together to govern ourselves, about care and intergenerational community, and about global justice including the intersection of climate change, migration, and peace. These are consistent with Reclaim's values, especially if one believes, as I do, that the best way to make change on big global problems is by finding ways to work together with people in the place you live.

Who are you? When and how did you begin to question the status quo, and begin to imagine a better world for all of us? What drew you specifically to political and community organizing?

My most important practical identities – the ones I practice and redefine every day and that I use to define myself – are: parent, engineer, and community organizer. As a parent I learn so much about myself as I care for my children, as they care for me, and as we navigate our relationships; I think sustained intergenerational experiences are part of being human, and how we treat young people also profoundly reflects the deep structure of our society – freedom, authoritarianism, agency, growth, the alignment of mutual interests. As an engineer, I am incredibly curious and excited to build new systems and ways of doing things, driven by my faith that groups of people can use our human capacities for creativity and invention to improve our lives, our society, our organizations. As a community organizer I am also motivated by curiosity and creativity and hope; I connect people, I learn from people, I understand myself better, I seek meaning and freedom.

I'm committed to equality: both the belief that I am worth more than no one, and no one is worth more than me. I've always felt strongly about equality. I often reflect that any child can easily observe the deficiencies of the the status quo, so obvious are its unfairnesses; it is patriarchy and white supremacy

and capitalism and other forms of deeply authoritarian culture and ideology that enter to provide false justifications and explanations for why the status quo is natural, or tolerable, or impossible to change. I think it may have been not having a father that allowed me to retain my ability to see the obvious. No one escapes unscathed, though, and I spent much of my childhood and young adulthood in tension between my belief in equality (and tentative faith in a better world) and cynicism rooted in powerlessness and fears and shame around social expectations, especially gender roles and scripts of success (which, after all, are based on hierarchy, on doing better than others). Through organizing, I have been able to grasp some of these connections, and engage in the long term struggle for a society whose culture and institutions reflect a commitment to equality and democracy. It is the great magic of social struggle that while we know none of us can be free, or assured of our intrinsic worth, until we achieve such a society, through the struggle itself we nonetheless become a little more free and a little more worthy. The events of 2016 drew me to community organizing, at least in its current version in my life, but it is this experience of growth and freedom that keeps me here.

The current Board of Directors has a vision for a Reclaim that is vibrantly member-led and democratic. What does this mean to you, and how will you bring your skills to the table to work towards this goal?

I strongly support this vision and have been an active leader in promoting it. Creating a member-led and democratic organization that also draws on the skills and stability and capacity of staff for the long haul is an amazing opportunity, and also very unique and complicated! There are not many roadmaps, at least in the community organizing world, and we will need to be innovative and creative.

I will highlight five skills I bring to the table. (1) I am the second longest-serving Board member, and I think at a moment of transition, maintaining institutional knowledge and history is important for our success. (2) I work incredibly hard and am very responsible. (3) I plan, think a few steps ahead, and hold people accountable well. (4) I am committed to mentoring and supporting others, and have or do mentor or peer-mentor many of the other people who have done impressive organizing work in or adjacent to Reclaim. (5) Perhaps most importantly to the specific question of democracy, I am creative at thinking through systems that involve both process and people. I have brought these skills to bear already on moving Reclaim toward a more member-led organization, using my facilitation skills to steward collaborative processes to refine and complete our theory of change, values statement, and mission statement in 2023 and to propose revised bylaws in 2024. (You are also voting on adopting those bylaws on this ballot; please vote yes!!)

What is your vision for a political transformation for Philadelphia and Pennsylvania? What do you personally bring to the table to guide Reclaim Philadelphia to get there? How must Reclaim Philadelphia grow for this to become possible?

My vision of the good life, in the somewhat near term, would involve a much shorter work week, jobs and unions for all, wonderful public services for necessities and leisure, social housing, universal healthcare, education for discovery and joy rather than molding good workers, unrestrained mobility, bodily autonomy, and caring intergenerational communities.

My analysis is that the governing power we should build toward is at the Pennsylvania level. Municipal politics are important for delivering services to working-class people, can provide interesting opportunities for creative governance and experiments with democratic participation, and certainly draw the attention of many politically engaged Philadelphians. But there is relatively little power and discretionary budget in the city government, and even that can often be preempted by an antagonistic state government. On the other hand, we are not yet powerful enough to seriously contest at the federal level (as the incredible expense and difficulty of electing and retaining progressive congresspeople like Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush has shown). State-level governing strategies are the best terrain to gain power and build infrastructure for the significant transformations we seek. Conservatives have long recognized this, using a sophisticated multi-decadal state-level power strategy to build from obscurity to immense federal power, along the way using state governments as “laboratories of authoritarianism.” Building at the state level also keeps us focused on what I believe is the most important and future-defining struggle in front of us: that against Christian nationalism, or MAGA, or fascism. Fortunately national progressive organizations like People’s Action and the Working Families Party have recognized that progressive movements must have a state power strategy. I would advocate Reclaim joining these efforts, and taking responsibility for what we are building and how we want to govern, including by helping elect and coordinate many of the most progressive lawmakers in the state.

There are many ways that Reclaim, and the progressive movement overall, needs to grow to achieve big change. The only strategy that has ever worked to make significant intentional social change in the United States is a group of committed organizers – socialists, unionists, abolitionists, civil rights strategists – acting within a much larger mass movement or network of organizations (usually at a moment of crisis or inflection). What does that mean for us now? It means that we must build, support, and connect ourselves with more working-class organization. There is no substitute for it or shortcut around it.

I believe Reclaim should grow to be a mass membership organization, with membership in the thousands, and at the same time grow more cooperative and invest in shared infrastructure. This includes political and organizational infrastructure both for ideological progressives per se, and for the larger multiracial working class in which we must operate and for whom we must deliver (the latter infrastructure not being specifically coded ideologically as “progressive”). How do we get there?

First, we must develop deeper connections and partnerships with unions in Philadelphia. No other form of organization has been so successful at building working-class organization, and community organizing alone is unlikely to do so, at least under capitalism, in which powerful relationships are arranged around production, labor, and profit.

Second, we must seriously reckon with the lessons from last year's mayoral primary. It is obvious on a map: Areas with pluralities of white voters split between Rebecca Rhynhart, Helen Gym, and Allan Domb, while majority Black and Latinx areas voted overwhelmingly for Chelle Parker. All kinds of excuses and evasions can be made, but we need to tell no lies: there will be no transformational progressive movement in Philadelphia without Black voters, and there will be none without working-class voters. We must engage in the long-term work of supporting progressive leaders, building year-round infrastructure, and building membership and base in Black, Latinx, and all working-class communities -- and this must be done in a manner that is respectful and consistent with the principle of self-determination, even if that causes discomfort or tension. I believe the synthesis of working through some of those tensions could unleash tremendous opportunities for power.

Third, it is critical to have active organizing around issues that are broadly popular with the base we are trying to build. Sometimes this can be hard, as there are issues that are popular with the base or leaders we currently have, that don't resonate with the base we are trying to build, and it can be hard to have clear-eyed conversations. But it is imperative that we avoid maximalism on progressive issues that risk dividing the base we want to build. The temptation to do so is great on social media, and becomes greater the more frustrated we become with politics. We can end up portraying, and often believing, that neighbors with different beliefs are wrong, and even intractable enemies. To get out of this trap, we need an organizing revival to regroup ourselves in meeting new people where they are and waging meaningful campaigns that force us to work with people outside our bubbles and compromise to get things done. Ultimately this is the only way we can show the large majority of ordinary folks in this country who are frustrated with politics that change is possible, and that we can be trusted with governing.

Fourth, to become a mass organization, we need structures that allow us to scale. To me, these are structures that make us more member-led and democratic. The only way we can build enough power is with structures and practices that facilitate a large number of members feeling belonging and collective ownership of the organization. The only way we can organize enough people is if members feel empowered to take the initiative to organize in their own communities, without waiting for staff approval. This is a difficult but very exciting challenge, and I think the bylaws that we have proposed, through the process I facilitated, are a great step forward. (Please vote in favor of adopting them!) And now we will experiment and learn and evaluate and grow!

Finally, and this may be controversial, but I believe that, especially in the case of a Harris presidency, we need to be ready to take risks and shake things up politically. We shouldn't settle for small gains through the legislative system, which can seem like the right path once some of your people have been elected into office and incorporated as a faction that plays nice within a party. The inside politics approach may or may not have been appropriate during the Biden administration, but we need much more meaningful change and should not wait for it to be delivered from our superiors. We need to be powerful, not just protest the powerful. We are going to have to ruffle some feathers, including of some of our allies, to disrupt the status quo and alter the balance of forces.

What makes Reclaim Philadelphia important to you?

I've been a Reclaim member for eight years. The two things I would name personally that have kept me involved and excited are the culture of power-building through pragmatic community organizing, and our commitment to leadership development and investment (including agitation, evaluation, and growth).

At this moment, I think Reclaim has an amazing opportunity to be a unique and uniquely powerful organization. I am a joiner and a booster, and love and admire the work of so many great organizations in Philadelphia. Let a thousand flowers bloom. At the same time, my observation is that most organizations either have operatives without people (staff, and either no membership structure or paper "members"), or people without operatives (volunteer-led, with a high turnover). My hope and excitement about Reclaim is that we can build a hybrid. As I wrote in our Executive Director job description, we are "eager to think outside the boxes and traps of the nonprofit world and [...] experiment to create powerful new models of success that combine the reliability of paid staff with the scalability and true power of member-led organizing." I believe we have an Executive Director and a group of member-leaders who share this vision and are ready to be innovative and emotionally intelligent in putting it into practice, and I am incredibly excited to continue building it.

How do you center joy in your work?

Organizing is about people. A lot of my identity comes from organizing, and many of my deepest relationships come from this work. I am joyful every single day in the practice of maintaining and deepening those relationships, and in the excitement of building new ones.

I will share a quote from Sendolo Diaminah from the Carolina Federation that I think about all the time. It expresses my feelings better than I can: "I have seen many of our members come back to our organization because developing the capacity to honestly face our lives, courageously face our lives, and then be able to take actions that actually make sense is incredibly ennobling, enabling, liberating for people—and they come back being like, 'I want more of that.'" (The source is this article, <https://convergencemag.com/articles/what-does-it-look-like-when-we-build-our-power-and-fight-the-right/>, which is a good read!)

As a candidate for the Board of Directors you must have ten (10) Reclaim Philadelphia members endorse your candidacy. Please provide the names of the ten (10) members who have provided endorsements for your candidacy.

Sarice Greenstein, Nikil Saval, Kyra Schwartz, Emiliano Rodriguez, Paige Fernandez, Jayson Massey, Mijuel Johnson, Judith Max Palmer, Spring Greeney, Natasha Cahill