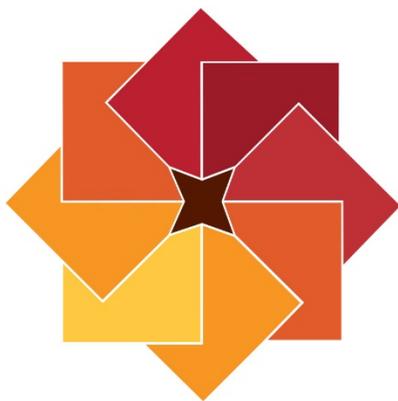


COREALIGN YEAR 4:

Preparing for the Half-Decade

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CoreAlign
Collaborate. Innovate. Impact.



INTRODUCTION

The “CoreAlign way” was how a graduate of CoreAlign’s Generative Fellowship described what this young but influential organization was bringing to the field. She explained,

“When I say the CoreAlign way, I mean the values of being generative, curious and open...the possibility of what we could do as a movement; it reaffirmed my newish orientation to the work, that you can try things and you will bounce back if they don’t work.”

CoreAlign will celebrate its 5th anniversary next year. In preparation, it will be taking stock of what it has accomplished and where it is going. This paper is designed to help shape the discussion of CoreAlign’s half decade reflection over the next year. It looks at CoreAlign’s impact on a dozen individuals who participated in one or more of CoreAlign’s Fellowship programs: the Generative Fellowship and Speaking Race to Power.¹ The interviewees, selected by the CoreAlign staff, were asked about how they became involved, whether and how the experience influenced their work, and their description of CoreAlign and its impact on the field of reproductive health, rights, and justice.

The mission of the organization – “CoreAlign builds a network of leaders working innovatively to change policies, culture and conditions that support all people’s sexual and reproductive decisions” – was strongly affirmed by those we interviewed. They frequently echoed CoreAlign’s strategy of having people come together outside of their organizational context, be curious and generous, address issues of race and power, develop trust, work together, and do things differently.² CoreAlign offered them a new way of thinking about and approaching their work. Most importantly, **CoreAlign has opened up a feeling of possibility, hopefulness, and even joy** in an area where activists and paid staff often had a bunker mentality due to the stress and trauma of responding to attacks for over 40 years. From the perspective of the interviewees, CoreAlign has been able to produce a sense of movement in the reproductive health, rights and justice field, a field that many described as having been “stuck”. It has done this by listening to people, responding to what they say is needed in the field; looking at how the field has changed over the decades; and using methods that support innovation and change.

At the heart of CoreAlign is its vision to create a framework and new narrative that will shift reproductive health, rights, and justice work from a war-weary embattled space that has by necessity developed a bunker mentality, to an open innovative movement that can sustain younger generations of activists and reinvigorate those who have long been dedicated to the field. Its method, using design thinking and a long-term vision, offers activists tools to move the work forward and a roadmap of where to go. To accelerate better policies and a different culture in the field, CoreAlign’s theory of change has three anchors: leadership development, innovative strategies, and a 30 year plan. The organization asks participants in its programs to come as individual movement builders not as organizational representatives. In this way, CoreAlign has approached a field that is – and that is in need of – changing, and brought to the

¹ One person did not attend a Fellowship program but had sent several staff members and had integrated their experience into the work

² This strategy was described to the author by Sujatha Jesudason in a meeting in January 2016.



center of its work issues and concerns that had previously been pushed to the margins, such as generational tensions, issues of race and power, and questions about geographic focus/investment.

This paper looks at the interviewees' descriptions of the work of CoreAlign during its first four years and then asks, what issues might CoreAlign consider as it moves forward? The first section, The Work, explores the respondents' descriptions of how they became involved in the organization and the way it intersected with their commitment to the RH/RR/RJ movement. It also notes how hard it is to describe CoreAlign as an organization. In the second section, the paper looks at the CoreAlign Approach, in particular its innovative methodologies. It is here that people talk about the "CoreAlign way" and its influence over both their thinking and action. This section concludes with a look at how respondents describe the impact of the organization to date and what that means for the future. The third section, Moving Forward, starts with some of the key questions that evolved from the interviews about CoreAlign's future. It then examines what CoreAlign is learning, and how that could benefit other issue areas focused on progressive social change. Most notably, CoreAlign is developing an approach to holding the tension between moving fast and slow; that is, to look decades ahead as part of generating new ideas and possibilities. If they can successfully define a process to address that tension, it could be a model for other aligned movements.

This is not an evaluation or assessment of CoreAlign's work. The paper provides information and asks questions that may be helpful as CoreAlign does a thorough examination of its programming and impact to date. The people we interviewed strongly believe in CoreAlign and its methods, but were unclear about the long term plan. From their view, CoreAlign is an important and needed force in in the RH/RR/RJ movement.³ Now CoreAlign will have to define its role moving forward.

THE WORK

COREALIGN – LOVE, SEX, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

CoreAlign' success in just a few years is impressive. It has approached the reproductive health, rights, and justice (RH/RR/RJ) field with a belief that change is possible using methods synonymous with its goal of creating a new culture that in turn accelerates better policies. CoreAlign is contributing to a narrative for the RH/RR/RJ movement that shifts the emphasis to an effective vision – love, sex, family and community – where access, choice, rights and justice are methods not the end goal. Below

"The longer CoreAlign is around and the more people who have gone through the program, it will have a ripple effect. It will be folks who have tapped in and can build connections. And it grows from there. It is really exciting to think of a movement that is open and enthusiastic and curious with one another, so our movement is evolving rather than doing the same things since 1973."

³ Respondents usually referred to "the movement" whether it was reproductive health, rights, and justice or just reproductive justice.



we look at how interviewees became involved in CoreAlign, the way CoreAlign tapped and reaffirmed their commitment to the RR/RH/RJ field, and what they were able (and not able) to say when asked to describe CoreAlign as an organization.

Getting Involved/Co-Creating

Early in the interview, we asked the respondents how they became involved with CoreAlign. Interviewees credited CoreAlign's founders with both "vision" and "brilliance," and they frequently noted *their own role* in the creation of the organization. They talked about becoming involved *pre-CoreAlign*; almost all of them had participated in events, meetings, and workshops that were part of the organization's development. For several of the respondents, the connection began with CoreAlign's leader, Sujatha Jesudason, during her work at Generations Ahead,⁴ or Tracey Weitz, CoreAlign's co-founder, and her long history working on issues of women's health/reproductive rights.⁵ Respondents spoke with a sense of pride about how they were involved in the formulation of CoreAlign as an organization. This experience of co-creating led to a sense of ownership in CoreAlign's work and an investment in the organization's success.

Even those who were initially skeptical eventually became champions of the organization. One person referring to the pre-CoreAlign mapping project done for the Ford Foundation commented, "It asked, who do you think your colleagues are in the field? It seemed weird and snarky; it was to rank the people you would like to be in the room with you." Yet this same respondent attended several pre-CoreAlign meetings and eventually hosted one herself.

Bringing people in to co-create allowed CoreAlign to develop a trust that was evident throughout the interviews. In many ways that trust was iterative: Sujatha and Tracey won people over and brought them into the process; they listened to the issues people in the RH/RR/RJ field faced, and allowed people to express their vision. That helped define the needs for the new organization and created stronger ties between those who were consulted. The pre-CoreAlign gatherings gave people something many wanted but had little way of getting – or even articulating. As one person put it, "We were discussing the movement now and what we were looking for, things that we did not normally talk about in our jobs."

In many ways, CoreAlign has quickly become a player in the field, partly *because* it was being co-designed with a group who could have been its competitors. The design process also reflects CoreAlign's values. One of the questions for CoreAlign as it moves forward is how it will create the type of bonding and loyalty with a wider audience that was so effective with their early adopters. This will come more easily for the people who are involved in CoreAlign programs. But for its larger movement-building goal, CoreAlign will want to figure out how that feeling of belonging can ripple out to a much broader community.

Strengthening Commitment

Being part of the development of CoreAlign and joining one of the Fellowship programs supported and confirmed the interviewees' dedication to the RH/RR/RJ movement. As one person said, participating in the CoreAlign Fellowship helped her realize, "what makes me tick."

⁴ The mission of Generations Ahead was to "bring diverse communities together to expand the public debate and promote policies on genetic technologies that protect human rights and affirm our shared humanity.

⁵ Weitz was at the University of California, San Francisco and currently works for the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation.



The experience with CoreAlign also pushed respondents to see and deepen their views of their role vis-à-vis a larger movement and to open up space to think about other possible contributions. It led to a sense of renewal but it could also surface confusion, especially for those who had worked in one arena for many years. For example, one respondent talked about how her experience in CoreAlign had pushed her to want to look at different issues and work in a new way. Asked about her future, she exclaimed, “God, I wish I knew! I am trying to figure that out right now... It’s hard; I trained as a lawyer and there are few places I can use my skill. I could stay here or create a new sort of structure.” There was no doubt, however, that she would stay in the RH/RR/RJ field.

This commitment to stay in the field was evident with the other respondents, even with those who were unclear – like the interviewee above – about what job they would do next. It generated a sense of enthusiasm rather than weariness. One person who had worked in a different type of social justice organization for two years talked about her decision to return to reproductive justice,

“It is my home and I love doing the work and I am excited. There are lots of possibilities... I want to grow and push our movement to take big and bold leaps... This work is key and central; it gave me my organizing chops. I tell people, if you ever want to do something hard and tense, talk with people who are dealing with abortion... It’s a wild world but I wouldn’t change it. It prepares you in a real way.”

CoreAlign opens up new ideas and ways of thinking to people; it may also want to look at how it helps its participants make their next step. Of course, not everyone felt transformed by their experience with CoreAlign, and there was some tension about leaving one’s organizational hat at the door. When asked how CoreAlign had influenced her, one interviewee explained, “I [already] came in with a high sense of efficacy and power;” she went on to say, “I really care about the movement overall but my heart is in the organization where I work.” It may be that in its next five years, CoreAlign can find ways that those who feel a deep commitment to the goals of their organization can be better integrated into the innovative practices it teaches.

Describing CoreAlign: Vision, Method and Practice

Surprisingly this group of interviewees – who often could not say enough good things about their experiences – were stumped when asked how would describe CoreAlign. The most common responses were silence or a pause or a comment about how difficult this question was to answer. In fact, it was the only question that seemed hard to answer. The short, to the point, explanation – the elevator speech – was virtually absent among this group of design thinkers.

How CoreAlign is portrayed is a little bit like a Rorschach; it depends on the person. But common themes emerged: generating ideas/vision, connecting people, leadership development, and movement building. For example, one respondent answered,

“Based on my understanding, CoreAlign intends to network the entire reproductive health and justice movement to make sure people are connected. They create spaces for people to come together to be creative, have tough conversations, to do things that you don’t do elsewhere. It nourishes movement leadership not by age, and leadership is not about whether you are the president or executive director; you can be in leadership whatever role you are in.”



One reason this question may have been so difficult for the respondents is that CoreAlign has different and complementary narratives. There is the *theory of change: vision, leadership, and innovative strategies*; the *mission to develop a network of leaders with innovative practice that change policies and a culture to support people's reproductive decisions*; and the larger *frame of promoting (healthy) love, sex, family and community*. The interviewees found it easier to talk about what CoreAlign *did* than what it *was*; it was hard for them to pull back from the methods they learned and their enthusiasm for putting them into practice. This signals a challenge for CoreAlign moving forward: is it primarily an organization that provides methods or processes to help social justice movements move toward a larger collective vision, or will it stay focused on its core commitment to the RH/RR/RJ movement. If there is a core commitment to RH/RR/RJ – which the people we interviewed clearly felt – what is the “vision” that needs to be more deeply integrated into all aspects of CoreAlign’s work.

One respondent addressed the challenge in this way,

“CoreAlign is still trying to find its core focus and core strategy. That is not a critique; it is only four years old. Also, I know that funder interests don’t always align with what Sujatha wants to do. I know their move to do more voter engagement work is a smaller piece of a bigger project. But I worry that the bigger project will be lost... It could be the right choice but what they initially brought to the table was the big idea and that is really needed.”

What CoreAlign has exposed is the deep commitment of those working in the RH/RR/RJ movement, their ability to move beyond their own piece of the pie to co-create a new organization, and their desire to move towards a new vision for the movement, a vision that has not yet fully evolved. This has happened in part because of the methods CoreAlign uses and teaches, tools that are shifting the movement.

TOOLS FOR MOVEMENT BUILDING: THE COREALIGN APPROACH

The people we interviewed believed the heart of CoreAlign was its ability to convey that change was possible and to provide the tools needed to be part of that change process. A key part of CoreAlign’s transformational framework is their innovative practices which opened up new ways of imagining the work for the interviewees. In turn, the participants were loyal to CoreAlign; they opened themselves up, trusted CoreAlign’s methods. It also gave them permission to be hopeful about the future.

It was the specificity of the training – and the results – that had such a powerful impact on the people we interviewed. Participating in the Fellowship program and learning about design thinking led to connecting with others and creating an excitement about the work that came through in their descriptions of the program.

“I would think about a problem or challenge or issue in the movement and I would approach it with dread, as an unsolvable problem; it is so big and huge and I won’t see change in my lifetime. I thought there were no real solutions... Part of the beauty of design thinking is it gets you out of the defeatist thinking. It has transformed the challenges in front of me. I have much more optimism and joy in my work.”



CoreAlign made people feel like they were in a special club defined by a new (and common) language and way of acting. They also thought of themselves as part of a reinvigorated, larger and forceful movement that would and could knit together reproductive health, rights and justice. The actual projects Fellows were required to come in with were vehicles of learning, but many of the respondents were less focused on their project and more on the importance of integrating new methods/skills into their work.

From the interviews, three results of the Fellowship trainings appeared to have the most impact: a new way of thinking about their work; the opportunity to build and strengthen relationships, and then applying and practicing what they had learned.

Design Thinking for a Movement

Central to everyone's direct or indirect experience of the fellowship process was the training in design thinking. The practice and all its different components opened up a new world to most of the interviewees. They talked extensively about the skills they learned and how they adopted a new practice which opened up possibilities both for their work and for the movement. Interviewees frequently mentioned the importance of learning to take risks, developing a bias toward action, being open to failure, and committing to restart. They talked about the process of breaking down big ideas in to smaller components that could be tested and corrected. Interviewees used phrases such as, "failing fast and freeing us up from needing to be right," the "relentless emphasis on vulnerability and failure," and "small bets, that is, risk-taking, doing something new in a small way."

Participation in one of the Fellowship programs also resulted in a shared language that signaled concepts and activities. This language not only countered the dominant narrative of how work gets done in the RH/RR/RJ movement, but also strengthened the ties between people. It was the shared language and application of design skills that were in part credited with another key part of movement building: the ability to have difficult conversations. One interviewee noted how hard conversations strengthened people when they took place within the structured context that CoreAlign provided, allowing them to hear honest responses to their work,

"We were grounded in a vocabulary of what is happening in the movement and it deepened our understanding; we were able to challenge each other. We don't know how to disagree with each other. How do we share a point and get feedback so we can grow our understanding?"

These practices created space for significant personal change. Many talked about the impact that opening up to the vulnerability of failure had on their work. The head of a reproductive justice group said, "Doing something scary and unknown is not in my wheelhouse, and I have to credit CoreAlign for introducing me to the idea of taking risks and learning." Another respondent talked about the concepts and skills she acquired, "I still think about and use some of the skills I learned at the retreat that center around trial and error, and not to be afraid to fail, and to keep trying different things... I think about CoreAlign and taking things step-by-step, iterations, that is, if this doesn't work, what is the next thing to try." Another person framed her learning this way,

"The relentless emphasis on vulnerability and failure it was one of the most generous frameworks anyone could offer our movement. I am a baby organizer, the scarcity model can push me and others to be hard, to have armor on because we are fighting a vicious opposition. CoreAlign takes the armor off and lets us be vulnerable."



Relationships and New Leadership

Design thinking and the practices it promote provided the platform for strengthening relationships among the Fellowship participants. Several interviewees expressed how the process – learning together, trying new behaviors and approaches, and being vulnerable – deepened ties between those participating in the Fellowship programs. For some, it was being in a context with others who cared about similar issues: “Just the people I met in the Fellowship, people I deeply respect. I made some great friendships and got to know important people in the movement. I didn’t know about where our passions overlapped...I was really siloed.” Similarly, a respondent noted, “It has expanded our network of colleagues; it is very hard to meet new people when you do this work.” But it was also the way people showed up. As one interviewee put it, “It was a great group of people and ego was very low; people were open and receptive.”

Relationship building addressed several things: breaking the isolation many people felt in their work, creating the opportunity to get to know others in the “movement,” supporting new ways of engaging, using design thinking and feeling part of something larger. The relationships that developed led to joint projects, new friendships, and support for the different ways Fellows were learning how to approach their work. The link between building relationships and design thinking became particularly apparent to one respondent who remarked, “One of the biggest lessons from my project was how the relationships were at the core of being able to be supportive of innovation.” Another interviewee talked about the new movement leadership that was being seeded—another important outcome:

“From the Fellowships and CoreAlign, my network has grown stronger. This generation of leaders is developing relationships with each other. When I go to conferences ... there are a bunch of other CoreAlign Fellows and we take a picture – and the number of people in the picture is growing and we have a particular language that we speak with each other.”

The connections that were being made between participants offered them an alternative to feeling either inside or marginalized by the powerful and relatively well-resourced groups that have dominated the reproductive rights narrative and funding. It also allowed people to build bridges and connections, so that a lawyer fighting for reproductive rights could interact – and learn from – a grassroots organizer working on maternal health issues in Black communities. Some respondents noted that their jobs were so demanding and narrowly focused on fighting attacks on reproductive freedom, it left them little time to know other aspects of the RH/RR/RJ field. So it wasn’t surprising that several people spoke gratefully about CoreAlign’s goal to create, “connectivity between the movements.”

Applying the Work

Design thinking and relationships were not just abstract ideas. They were immediately put into action with people’s projects, and were then applied to – and often changed – the way participants conducted their work. For example, one interviewee shared that the CoreAlign language and method were now integrated into the everyday operations of her job, “It is the way people on my team are approaching big or small projects especially when planning new things. Former Fellows have come to speak at our office, and it has expanded our network of colleagues.”

Another respondent explained the impact CoreAlign had on tackling sensitive issues in this way,



“I am working on a practice on disability rights. It is a challenging issue – the intersection of reproductive rights and disability rights – and they [at work] wanted to not go ahead for obvious reasons. Our willingness to go ahead and do this is partially attributed to CoreAlign... It pushed me a lot harder than before I did the Generative Fellowship.”

Still another talked about CoreAlign giving her the support for what she already knew she wanted to do,

“I was ambivalent about being an entrepreneur full force because it was scary, especially financially. It [the Fellowship] made me feel emboldened to claim myself. I also got from CoreAlign the belief that we can figure out a way to measure the value of new ideas.”

Understanding the principles and benefits embedded in applying new approaches was an important part of the process. One of the respondents referred back to attending a Heroic Retreat offered by CoreAlign early on. She had been critical of trainings where participants were asked to tell their personal stories, but during this retreat she began to see another side. Personal stories were actually part of the work, not just an exercise. She described her transformation like this:

“In the course of the retreat, I understood, and my way of thinking was reframed. I realized that this is part of a movement and I am trying to be part of moving people and if I wasn’t sharing, I was only doing the work *on behalf of others and that is not movement work*, it is charity work. It has to be about why it matters to me and my life, not on behalf of others. That was a radical shift for me to have.”

A similar story was relayed by another interviewee who realized that she was approaching her work with youth from a victim narrative, a “deficit-based model.” The youth came in with problems that she was charged with helping them to solve. Participating in CoreAlign flipped the script. Now she sees, “the young people I work with and how they are navigating the challenges of their everyday and how they are heroes... That was big for me.”

CoreAlign offered a place to reenergize and support the respondents in their belief in and commitment to the reproductive health, rights and justice movement. It also left many people feeling adrift after the Fellowship ended. Some interviewees talked about how the time they had was too short to really investigate and put their project into practice. Others went back to jobs working every day with people who had not been in the retreat, minimizing the opportunity and potential to put their new approach and commitment into practice. Several were seeking ways to continue the support and learning they received, noting Facebook pages and emails were good for information sharing but not a satisfying way to stay connected.

One person summed it up saying,

“I’d love to see CoreAlign play a bigger networking role for people who have gone through the Fellowship. Maybe put some more resources to nurture geographic hubs of Fellows and getting people together face to face. People don’t want a Happy Hour, they want something really inspiring. The Fellowship was really deep work, really got us thinking. We could really connect to one another; it is why we got into this work in the first place.”



What distinguishes CoreAlign’s work is the design thinking frame, which creates results in or outside of one’s own work environment and a bond with others. Design thinking also offers a safe way to explore some of the personal blocks to leading for change, offering a structure that can be used by people at different levels of experience and positional power. It has an appeal to a new generation of leaders who are looking for ways to make an impact without waiting for years to pay their dues in a static field. These movement-building practices may be key to tapping into ways people from very different positions and experiences can make significant contributions. Design thinking and innovation, relationships, and action – the methods and practices to change RH/RR/RJ movement – made a big difference to the respondents. How CoreAlign will both maintain this energy *and* widens its scope beyond the Fellowship participants in order to influence the overall field is harder to define.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

“I think over the past 3 years there were some folks that were really skeptical of the first Generative Fellowship and the 30 year Plan. There has been a shift to, ‘Oh, okay it couldn’t hurt.’ I think it is deliberate; we are out to address a particular problem, we are stuck, we need to figure out a way to win. So there is a renewed sense of possibility.”

CoreAlign’s success in defining innovative methods offers the possibility of new practices in the reproductive health, rights, and justice movement. The creative thinking of the founders and their ability to develop an organization with the intention of being innovative, bridging divides, and releasing new energy has opened up space in a field that to many felt stagnant. Interviewees were strong believers in CoreAlign’s impact. At the same time they wondered how dependent CoreAlign’s success was on the current leadership.

The Impact

There was little hesitation when respondents were asked about the impact CoreAlign was having on the field. In many ways, what they had learned from being involved with the organization mirrored how they defined impact. The interviewees talked about CoreAlign’s contributions in light of the possibilities that it opened for them and for the RH/RR/RJ movement overall. They believed CoreAlign was changing things, even though they were not always sure how to describe it outside of their own experience. One person aptly described it this way,

“We all know... if we continue to do what we have been doing and we do not change, we will lose and lose and lose in little increments in every year until it is all gone.”

The act of bringing new ideas and leadership to RH/RR/RJ was enormously appealing to those interviewed. They wanted to be part of a bigger change, and many saw themselves as leaders in that process. Having a vision had deep resonance with the interviewees. However, it was easier for respondents to talk about enacting the skills of generative thinking than to articulate the vision which for many was implicit in their work. That may be because, for this group, the big vision is tied to the 30 Year Plan. One respondent offered her view by claiming, CoreAlign is,



“asking bigger, audacious questions about what are we going to do in the future. The 30 Year Plan will be different... it will give us a bigger bang for the buck.”

But the 30 Year Plan was also something that raised unanswered questions about the future of the RH/RR/RJ movement. This was reflected in (unsolicited) comments such as, “I know the 30 year vision has been really a challenge, but that just reflects the challenge [in the movement]...it’s just still a work in process.” Others expressed worries that the plan was no longer a part of CoreAlign’s larger agenda; there was a perceived silence from CoreAlign about the next steps.

One person thoughtfully noted,

“What was less successful was the idea that CoreAlign could emerge out of nowhere and solve the problem of the lack of vision [in the movement] by developing a master plan that might be the Holy Grail that is always elusive.”

She goes on to say, “It was an impossible task...there are over 135 organizations that say they are working on this issue in the US. It is a complex universe...that means a complex movement.”

It was interesting that participants had faith in CoreAlign’s ability to make something happen, even those who questioned whether it is possible. Much of this comes down to the leadership, or more specifically to Sujatha.

CoreAlign’s Leadership

Soon into the interview process, it was clear that for many of the respondents Sujatha’s leadership was central. It explained both their involvement in CoreAlign and their assessment of its success. The interview did not include a question about Sujatha or CoreAlign’s leadership but, not surprisingly, she was often mentioned in responses to questions about the organization and its future. An early interviewee noted, “So much about why CoreAlign has been successful is Sujatha’s leadership... I don’t know what it would be like if Sujatha wasn’t there.”

As with their stories of co-creating the CoreAlign organization, respondents claimed Sujatha, talking about a shared history or their common approaches or their belief in her ability to bring even those who are reluctant into the CoreAlign way with statements like, “There are no areas she [Sujatha] cannot add value.” The connection described between CoreAlign and Sujatha often highlighted her ability to open up possibilities by moving between concepts, application, and the deeply personal. An interviewee volunteered,

“I respect Sujatha as a leader so, so deeply... I have worked in scrappy ways, constantly under-resourced. Sujatha has really figured out how to give groups needed resources. ..She really borrows from tech; when we put a justice-oriented lens on design thinking, it is super rich. The idea that we deserve resources helps me understand my power as an organizer and the power of our work differently.”

This type of connection was also evident in this comment, “She has really pushed us on language and the frame around innovative, generative, taking risks and it has influenced me in thinking beyond the pro-choice frame but trying to create a bigger vision that is pro-family, pro-community.”



The depth of the connection to Sujatha, even for those who were not close to her, emphasized their belief, and perhaps worry, that CoreAlign's work really depended on her. CoreAlign is just starting to create a cadre of people who believe that the RH/RR/RJ movement can work together, generate new ways of doing its work, and win. In its infancy, it is not clear how Sujatha will carry this "movement" forward as it grows. Yet it is Sujatha's leadership that is most often identified with CoreAlign's success. There were two interesting comments that addressed this problem but from very different stances. The first argues for more distributive leadership at CoreAlign.

"Sujatha is incredibly dynamic and brilliant and ... she is also tough because she is so synonymous with CoreAlign. They need to make space for some of the younger staff members.... She has high expectations. She also is a huge fan of managing up. She wants folks to demand opportunity on their own; but sometimes the best leaders need to be cultivated."

Another saw it differently; she identified the problem as Sujatha being unwilling or unable to commit to leading the next stage of the movement. Describing the lack of traction on the 30 year plan, she argued,

"There were a lot of factors that contributed to that – including a tension in Sujatha's leadership. She wanted people to own it and carry it forward; and my analysis is that we need a single champion that is going to make it happen. It is not happening collectively, and Sujatha has prioritized other work."

These comments revealed a tension in CoreAlign's analysis of the role of individual as leader and the need for collective leadership. Individual leadership, and the power of charismatic leadership, was not something that the interviewees discussed though many saw themselves as leaders both in organizations and in generating new ideas. But working together and building relationships was also something that was both highly valued and enacted by the respondents. It may be that collective leadership works best when the people are moving towards the same vision and can see how their contributions fit into longer-term change even if their short-term goals differ. Over time and with a strong vision in place, it may be that the role of CoreAlign's – or others' – leadership becomes less of a central focal point.

THE FUTURE

COREALIGN QUESTIONS

The people we interviewed and their insights into CoreAlign raised several questions that CoreAlign will want to consider as it goes into its five year assessment process. Some of the questions are specifically about the organizational goals, others relate more the people/leadership CoreAlign has enlisted in its efforts to change the field. Listed below are a few of the most salient.



Vision

CoreAlign's theory of change starts with a three legged approach – vision, new leadership, and innovative practices, which creates the platform for significant and needed changes in the RH/RR/RJ field. The organization's success in developing a methodology and a set of practices and its expanding work in identifying new and experienced leadership has the potential to alter RH/RR/RJ, infusing energy and reinvigorating movement. The vision, however, is less clear. As noted above, this seems to be a result of the challenges with the 30-Year Plan, one of CoreAlign's initial programs. In relation to vision, CoreAlign needs to ask three questions: 1) whether the initial conception they had for the RH/RR/RJ vision holds including who is involved in creating a vision for the RH/RR/RJ movement, 2) is the 30 year plan a blueprint for action or an aspirational vision, and 3) how the organization can help catalyze a set of long-term goals of the RH/RR/RJ field that may not have "buy-in" from all groups but will articulate possibilities for a the new generation of movement activists CoreAlign has built?

Narrative

CoreAlign does not talk about narrative but it is clear from the interviewees that CoreAlign has inspired a new way of thinking and talking about the RH/RR/RJ field. One reason the vision may be so difficult to define is the long term struggle in the RH/RR/RJ movement over narrative. Is this a movement about choice (abortion)? Is it about rights or health or justice? About access?

CoreAlign's contribution has been to move this discussion beyond a clash of entrenched positions, and to open up the space for an affective, aspirational narrative linked to a long term vision. As noted in its upcoming innovation conference, CoreAlign has identified the RH/RR/RJ movement as embracing love, sex, family, and community. That formulation has powerful possibilities, but the critical question is whether CoreAlign will promote that new narrative as part of its core mission, and long-term vision?

Connection

One of the key components of the way CoreAlign does its work is building a network among the people that participate in its programs. That requires infrastructure, intention, and resources. Several of the interviewees were looking to CoreAlign to continue to support the enthusiasm that came from the Fellowship, especially putting into practice the methods they learned through the program. They believed this was a key role CoreAlign could and should play.

In addition, it is hard to overemphasize the deep commitment that interviewees felt to the RH/RR/RJ field. Participating in the CoreAlign process often opened up new ideas and possibilities for the respondents; but several found it difficult to figure out where they could best apply these new skills. As CoreAlign begins to connect Fellows with one another and build ties among its participants, it should consider whether and how it can help people think through their next steps and positions within the RH/RR/RJ movement.

Finally, CoreAlign's ability to bring people into its circle – according to the people we talked with – was often through early co-creation of the organization and/or connections with CoreAlign's leadership. Whether and how CoreAlign plans to scale its impact was rarely discussed by the interviewees even though some volunteered their belief that the numbers who understand the CoreAlign way was growing.

In advancing the connections CoreAlign has already forged, the key questions are: 1) In what ways can CoreAlign continue to support the relationships and projects it has already seeded? 2)



How can it continue connecting people to one another and to new positions in the RH/RR/RJ field that is both strategic and impact? 3) To reach scale, how will CoreAlign serve as a resource for all interested participants from the RH/RR/RJ field not just those who go through the Fellowship?

LOOKING AHEAD: BUILDING A LARGER MOVEMENT

The ideas and methods that CoreAlign has adopted are still being tested. At the same time, CoreAlign should consider what it can offer other progressive movements. From its unique vantage point, CoreAlign could join others by bringing ideas and experience from the RH/RR/RJ field to a wider audience. The RH/RR/RJ field is one of the most difficult progressive areas to work in because the Right has been so successful in developing a narrative – against abortion and other reproductive rights – that resonates across gender, race/ethnicity, and class. The RH/RR/RJ movement has to work within their own field to address issues of race/ethnicity, class, immigration status, gender identity and other issues which have often been divisive. However, the narratives and violence that has followed RH/RR/RJ – especially abortion – is not isolated and it has and can be used against other progressive movements.

Learning from the RH/RR/RJ Movement

Progressive social justice movements all face enormous challenges and fierce opposition. However, the right-wing backlash against the reproductive health, rights and justice movement makes it vulnerable to being jettisoned in coalitions for social change that often want to avoid reproductive issues for fear of dividing their members/constituents. This hesitation can be reinforced when large well-funded reproductive rights institutions embrace an approach that most closely reflects who they identify as their main constituency, older white women. The long presence and evolution of the reproductive justice movement has insisted on linking the issues of race, economic inequality, immigration status, environmental issues, and gender, thereby framing a new narrative. They are fighting to make sure poor women and women of color are not “thrown under the bus,” by a movement desperately trying to stave off the erosion of “a woman’s right to choose.”

Now CoreAlign has stepped into the RH/RR/RJ field with a reframe calling for a movement that embraces love, sex, family and community. It also is openly claiming that the movement can and needs to move in new directions. This attempt to reignite, redirect, and revive the movement – including its analysis of how to move in these difficult spaces – could be a model for other movements and movement building organizations. It could also help to promote the centrality of reproductive health, rights and justice in progressive social change by co-creating a new narrative.

CoreAlign is not the only group, either in RH/RR/RJ or other movements, that is willing to step into and openly discuss these issues. But it does seem to have the capacity and vision to bring people together to ask what would it take for movements to 1) work more effectively and in alignment, 2) appeal to current/emerging issues, and 3) embrace and co-create with new generations of change-makers. More importantly, CoreAlign has a method for acting that is moving from the conceptual to a set of practices that generate new possibilities. In addition, CoreAlign’s willingness to listen to, build on, support, and challenge the reproductive health, rights and justice movement with its numerous internal conflicts, gives it the standing and track record to share its knowledge and experience with others.



New Ideas and Approaches

CoreAlign has introduced a methodology – using design thinking – that is bringing new people and ideas in the RH/RR/RJ field. The method when put into practice with a social justice lens has the power to generate excitement and energy into different fields. It offers skills that help people see possibilities; these skills are teachable and are easy to apply, opening up space to a wide variety of movement participants rather than keeping the focus on people in positional power. In that way CoreAlign can be strategic about building and using power. In other words, CoreAlign’s method has started a new conversation that is able to challenge the approach of existing power networks creating an alternative base to re-envision existing strategies and behaviors, and amplify new messages.

There are four ways this may appeal to other movements. First, it is targeting people with ideas rather than positional power. Second, its methodology can be used in different settings – organizations, networks, and individual spheres of influence. Third, it has an overarching frame without constraining people to one idea or policy. Finally, it is building relationships among those who go through their process but also encouraging relationship building within people’s own coalitions and networks.

Intersectional in Action

Struggle within social change movements over identity-based approaches has often created conflicts and misunderstandings. Talking about issues of race, gender, and sexuality have often been seen as diversions from the real issue of economic inequality. But as #blacklivesmatter has shown, these arguments and divisions are tactics that keep people from bringing their whole selves to movement building.

The “CoreAlign way” easily includes an intersectional approach keeping activists grounded in action without forcing them to make “practical” choices that exclude essential parts of their identity/experience. Using design thinking using a justice perspective has the potential to translate the intersectional approach from a concept to a set of actions by emphasizing the importance of being generative, bold, and having a bias towards doing (and making mistakes). This builds compassion and rigor into movement building, emphasizing accountability that is iterative rather than punitive. Translating these methods for other movements at this time could be an important contribution to the field.

Moving Forward

As CoreAlign conducts its full assessment, it can consider the issues addressed in this paper. For the most part, the people we talked with were big believers in the “CoreAlign way”. Where CoreAlign will need to pivot and restart is a question that will be addressed in its 5 Year Assessment. CoreAlign might consider bringing in creative social movement builders – with influence and power – to inform a new vision. That vision could be infused in other networks/movements and leverage change within the RH/RR/RJ field. In many ways CoreAlign has already moved in this direction, by involving people based on their commitment not their positional influence or power. It’s a small bet on a big issue – how love, sex, family, and community are accessible to all.