



Practicing Democracy Project

The Practicing Democracy Project (PDP), led by Marshall Ganz at the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard Kennedy School, enables people to work together to develop the leadership, build the community, and create the power to fulfill the democratic promise of equal, inclusive, and collective agency. PDP supports educators, researchers, and practitioners in engaging with questions of shared identity, self-governance, and people-centered power.

Our Work

PDP organizes its work into three domains: leadership development, praxis development, and organizational capacity development. Leadership development enables people to develop the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacity for the exercise of democratic leadership—accepting the responsibility for enabling others to achieve shared purpose under conditions of uncertainty, through five core practices of civic relationship building, values-based public narrative, constituency-based strategizing and mobilization of collective action, and the structuring of democratic organization. Praxis development builds effective tools, methods, and processes to creatively support adaptation of these core practices to effective collective action in multiple contexts. Organizational capacity development engages organizations, movements, and institutions in mutual learning to initiate, sustain, and renew democratic practice across diverse domains.

“Democracy is not something you have, but something you do. It is a verb. And we are creating it, or un-creating it, all the time.”

Marshall Ganz
Director, Practicing Democracy Project

Background

PDP builds on the work of Marshall Ganz, his students, collaborators, and colleagues who since 2001 have designed and implemented online and in-person courses, diverse practice workshops, and action research projects, all rooted in a practice pedagogy in which learners become teachers and followers become leaders. More than 5,700 people have been trained through these courses, in addition to some 10,000 more municipal, health care, educational, and social movement leaders through workshops and trainings worldwide.

Impact

PDP contributed to the grassroots organization of the 2007-2008 Obama campaign and to facilitating the DREAMer movement and to the development of organizing networks in the American Midwest, Arab Middle East, Nordic countries, the Balkans, Japan, Australia, and parts of Africa, India, and China to fight climate change, increase literacy, organize trade unions, reform education, end child marriage, stop gender-based violence, build political parties, and support young people opposing gun violence and fighting for climate justice.